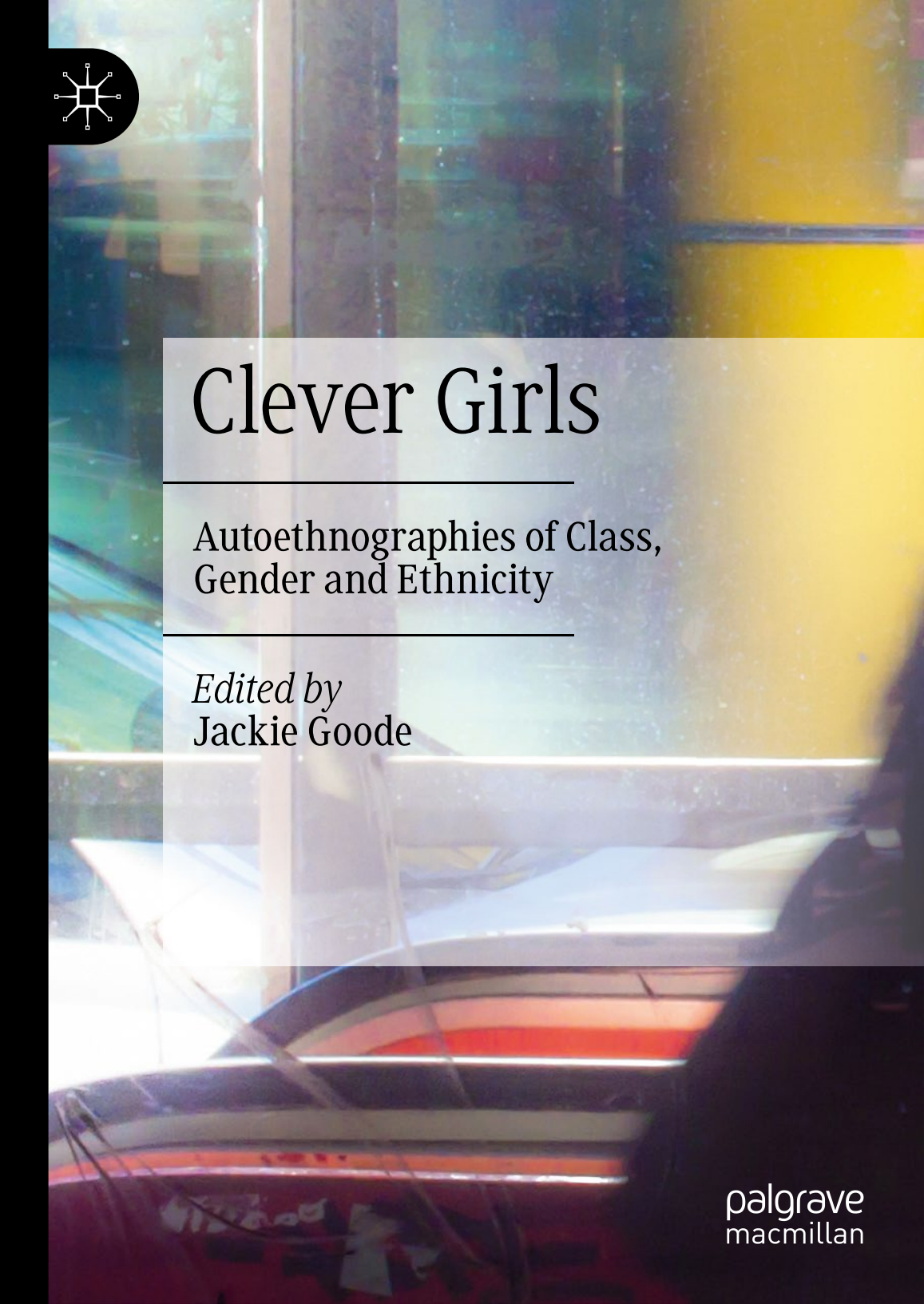

Clever Girls

Autoethnographies of Class, Gender and Ethnicity

Edited by
Jackie Goode

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Clever Girls

"*Clever Girls* is a powerful, intergenerational meditation on character formation and how it is shaped by class, race and gender. Its first-hand accounts are fascinating, sometimes shocking in the ways in which women have had to struggle, and always thought-provoking."

—Bernadine Evaristo, *author of* Girl, Woman, Other*, shortlisted for the 2019 Booker Prize*

"In this book Dr Jackie Goode has provided a platform from which the reader witnesses the powerful voices of a group of women, identified at a young age as 'Clever Girls', telling stories of their intersecting experiences of class, gender, and race set against temporal and cultural contexts from the post-war period to the present. The book is a collective autoethnography which captures the complexities, ambiguities, paradoxes, joys, and celebrations that will engage and inform women of all ages and stages."

—Kim Etherington, *University of Bristol, UK*

"By turns brilliant, moving, uplifting, harrowing, shocking—these stories of intrepid cleverness amongst girlhoods positioned by the Othernesses of class, gender and ethnicity, are hugely important for understanding the complex landscapes of today. A must-read that will inspire you to begin your own autoethnography."

—Valerie Walkerdine, *Cardiff University*, *UK*

"An urgent and extraordinary book! The vibrancy of the autoethnographic accounts together with the methodological rigour and theoretical sophistication hold together that which is so often rendered apart in academic writings: 'experience-near' accounts of situated lives along with analytic nuance."

—Gail Lewis, *Birkbeck, University of London*, *UK*

"These contributors' accounts show the very best of what autoethnography can do: incisive, moving, and brave, they show the reader the complex ways in which relations of inequality are experienced and how history is lived on the ground."

—Steph Lawler, *The University of York*, *UK*

Jackie Goode
Editor

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Preface

> Her mother's face lost something of its smile.
>
> 'Oh, my darling!' she exclaimed in sudden flattened tones, 'don't go and get a reputation for being *clever*, whatever you do. People do dislike that sort of thing so much in a girl'. (*Consequences*. E.M. Delafield)

All research contains the autobiographical. Even if we don't think of our own lives as the major impetus behind our academic enquiries, we inevitably bring all of our past, current and imagined future selves into our research encounters and activities. These take centre stage in autoethnography, a form of inquiry that mines personal experience for its potential to illuminate broader social, cultural and economic issues. Arising from those transitions in my own life—from my working-class girlhood and attendance at a primary school in one of the 'roughest' parts of town to acquiring a doctorate in sociology and a 'late' career as an academic researcher—the subject of social class formed the starting points for this diverse set of autoethnographies which collectively explore lived experiences of classed, gendered and racialised subjectivity.

Bringing up a young family in the immediate post-war period, my parents wanted 'better' for me and my older sisters than their own lives had brought. My sisters were 'war babies'. The eldest can remember hiding under the table when the air-raid sirens sounded. And when she started school, the maps on the classroom walls were coloured pink to

show the extent of the British Empire. I used to think I could remember the war too but that was probably due to Sunday afternoons spent watching black and white (but mostly white) television films full of the triumphs of stiff upper lip (male) derring-do, like *Bridge over the River Kwai* and *The Dambusters*, which were shown for years after the war ended, engendering what Marianne Hirsch calls 'postmemory'. A common thread through biographical interviews I conducted recently with men in their sixties and early seventies was a description of life in the 1950s as constrained by post-war austerity and the stifling values of the previous generation, represented in their memories as a generalised 'greyness'. I don't remember my early life in the fifties that way.

As a young child, the boundaries of my life extended only as far as the newly built council flat I grew up in above my father's newly built butcher's shop (where I played 'shop' myself, equipping my dolls with newly obsolete ration-book coupons), my solo bus-ride to the newly built primary school and the classrooms and playgrounds where my official education began. None of this seemed grey. Or pink, for that matter. And by the time I was old enough to apprehend the quality of a more public and political life beyond those parameters, everything had changed again and the drabness my interviewees alluded to had given way to the bright colours of the 'swinging sixties' in a world that was expanding in all sorts of exciting and optimistic ways.

Lacking the resources to imagine and plan for alternative futures and equipped only with what they have known and learnt, parents are fated to prepare the children who will leave them behind for a world that is already disappearing. For 'upwardly mobile' children of working-class parents, there is a double estrangement. By the time I became an independent young professional at the beginning of the 1970s, I had left so much behind. Olden days. Olden (working-class) ways. That being so, the quotation above from *Consequences*, written in 1919 by Edmée Elizabeth Monica de la Pasture, upper-class daughter of a Count and better known as author E.M. Delafield, couldn't possibly have any resonance for me, could it?

A story: There was a boy in my class at grammar school called Keith Whittaker. He was often top of the class but he wasn't one of 'our' boys—the Arts lot who sat around during breaks performing our emergent selves

to our own little group audience, trying to impress each other with witty conversation laced with literary allusions. For a period, one boy and I spent every lunch time doing this—sitting opposite each other on top of the desks, quoting Oscar Wilde, engaging in deep philosophical debates, creating a competitive and amusing mutual admiration society. And then we didn't anymore because he started going out with another girl who was way ahead of me in the dating game. Infatuated with my English teacher as I was at the time and thrilled when my contributions in class clearly delighted him, I guess I'd been unconsciously practising with a more attainable potential object of desire. Sadly, by the time I caught up with my peers, my verbal and intellectual skills didn't seem to work on any of the boys I actually desired. We might laugh and joke, these boys and I, but they never asked me out. Especially Phil. Phil especially never asked me out. Should I stop trying to be so 'clever'? Was that the problem? From an accretion of such mundane early experiences are gender regimes made and (heterosexual) subjectivities formed.

In *The Stuart Hall Project* by John Akomfrah, Hall refers to subjectivity as an endless unfinished conversation, one that touches upon unspeakable stories, narratives of culture and history and lives that might have been lived but weren't. No single thing, whether class or national position, geographic or grandparents' origins can any longer suffice as a definition of who one is, he says—which is what is behind the frequently posed question of where one is from. It is a question posed to some more than others, of course, as Afua Hirsch illustrates in *BRIT(ish), on Race, Identity and Belonging,* in which she embarks on what Deborah Levy describes as integral to a female writer's project: the task of 'unknotting the ways in which she has been put together by the Societal System'. In the first part of her autobiography, Levy writes, 'It's exhausting to learn how to become a subject'. She writes about her father being taken away when she was five and imprisoned for his anti-apartheid activism. She writes about his unexpected return three years later. Her mother tells her and her brother not to be shy, to just be themselves. 'We nodded gravely', she writes, 'and went off to practise being ourselves'. She writes that women are 'cursed with the desire not to be disappointing'.

In the early days of that ever-unfinished conversation of subjectivity, I learnt from boys that I was disappointing. But I also learnt from teachers

that I was clever enough to go to university. Once there, I practised being myself. I practised not being disappointing. After that, I did a post-graduate professional qualification and got a job. I met a man there. We married. We had children. Some years later I went to a school reunion. Phil was there. He did a double-take as we introduced ourselves. We chatted amiably about our respective young families. As I was leaving, he asked for my number. I disappointed him. Again. By the next reunion, with my children at school and having resumed my professional career, I wore the mantle of the middle-class subject with practised ease. I started a conversation with another man. I hadn't known him very well at school, but he remembered me. 'Oh yes', he said 'you were the sort of girl-version of Keith Whittaker'. What did that mean? One of the clever ones, he explained. Single again in later life, several men tell me they find 'bright' women like me desirable. I begin to see it coming. It's not hard to spot. They are not subtle. So, do you have a PhD then, they ask admiringly. 'I love your mind', one tells me. Now my mind seems to have become an object of desire. Desirable/undesirable. Attainable/unattainable. Success/failure. Wins. Losses. How complicated it can be for clever girls.

Via a Master's degree in Education followed by a one-day 'Women's History' workshop when my children were small, I 'met' other 'clever girls' like me, through the accounts they had written about their experiences of making similar transitions from working-class backgrounds into academic careers. As scholars like Carolyn Steedman, Valerie Walkerdine and Gail Lewis, all contributors to Liz Heron's *Truth, Dare or Promise: girls growing up in the Fifties,* entered the academy they began to change the canon and the curriculum to take account of what they knew, by recognising the importance of deconstructing monolithic notions like class and attending to the intersections of class, gender and race in the formation of subjectivities and in the constitution and reproduction of structural inequality. But this didn't all happen at once. Feminist scholars challenged notions of class that excluded women's experiences; queer theorists, women of colour and working-class women challenged straight, white middle-class feminists' exclusion of their experiences; the concept of intersectionality became a tool to examine how different forms of structural inequality co-exist and dynamically interact; and post-colonial and critical race theorists highlighted the need to bring crucial *historical*

perspectives to bear to recognise the ways in which the economic system itself which had formed the basis of traditional theorisations of class is not only gendered but has always been deeply racialized.

Writing about the lived experiences of these developments continues a line in British scholarship on class and culture (and later on gender, race, sexuality and disability) that began with Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* and progressed through Liz Heron's collection, Heidi Safia Mirza's *Young, Female and Black*, Bev Skeggs' *Formations of Class and Gender* and Pat Mahony & Christine Zmroczek's *Class Matters* to Valerie Walkerdine and colleagues' *Growing Up Girl.* This collection builds on the tradition established by these writers. Class may have been its *starting point*, but through both its theorising and its autoethnographic contributions, it examines how the processes of production of classed, gendered and racialized subjectivities are mutually constitutive. It does not explicitly examine intersections with disability or sexualities, although experiences of embodiment, formations of sexuality and mental health issues do figure in contributors' stories. In its scope, it goes some way towards answering Valerie Walkerdine's call for an approach which brings together the historical and cultural work of understanding the specificities of classed, gendered and racialized subjectivities in a variety of locations, the legacies of that experience into the present, the governance and disciplining of these subjects and communities across a specific historical period and how this works in the present.

It features members of my own generation and that of the women who followed us. How did we all experience growing up as what Walkerdine refers to as the 'complex and contradictory' nature of being a 'clever girl' (or does the path to recognising our own abilities continue to be a winding one?); and how do we experience it now as older, middle-aged and young women? Is there something peculiarly problematic about being clever and female? Are working-class women in particular susceptible to either 'Tall Poppy' or 'Imposter' Syndrome? Is this magnified for women of colour and/or of mixed heritage? Are we, to revive that New Labour mantra, 'all middle class now?' Or are some 'clever' younger women what Valerie Hey and Rosalyn George call 'dissident daughters', engaged in 'down classing' or questioning the efficacy, value and costs of higher education as a route to 'success'?

Would we agree with what Lauren Berlant calls 'cruel optimism'—the idea that the promise of social mobility through individually achieved 'betterment' is a fantasy with the potential to harm us while maintaining the status quo? Or are we of necessity learning to become appropriate subjects of a neoliberal democracy? Is the very notion of 'self' in fact, as Bev Skeggs suggests, a bourgeois conceptualisation that stands in opposition to the working-class subject; or one whose unacknowledged foundations lie in constructs of race and sexuality formed through colonial science and Enlightenment philosophy, as Sita Balani suggests? Do we eschew all notions of 'dependency'? Or is there evidence of valuing connection, including with those we may have 'left behind'—in the UK and elsewhere—when we moved away? Are there still the kinds of tensions between class origins, intellectual ability and educational advancement that Richard Hoggart documented in relation to clever working-class *boys* of the post-war era? If so, how, when and where do such tensions manifest themselves? And how do we manage those moments when such tensions surface, either privately or publicly? The collection incorporates a temporal component, then, tracing continuities and change across generations through stories from the children of the Welfare State/Butler's 1944 Education Act; Thatcher/Blair's children; and Cameron/May/Johnson's post-EU referendum/Trump-era children—at another moment of radical change.

The fifteen writers appearing here range in age from late twenties to early seventies. The worlds most of them were born into were quite different to that of my childhood and youth. Over the course of their lives, globalisation has created a very different landscape to the one that surrounded me in my formative years. Those who followed me grew up familiarising themselves with increasingly diverse intimate partnership and family arrangements; successive waves of feminism; vastly changed labour-market conditions, industrial relations and patterns of workplace participation in the wake of de-industrialisation; the arrival of the internet; repercussions from our colonial past brought to prominence by, among other things, the fate of some members of the 'Windrush generation'[1]; Celebrity Culture that appears to offer new routes from

[1] British citizens who came to the UK from the Commonwealth as children, following the Second World War (some, from the Caribbean, on the British ship the 'Empire Windrush' in 1948). Their

'rags' to 'riches'; the uncovering of widespread sexual abuse; the #MeToo movement; the breakdown of the post-war settlement; government policies and reality television programmes that portray certain groups in ways that contribute to their ongoing vilification; gender fluidity and debates about identification and recognition; challenges to white people to check our privilege; the widespread use of social media, bringing new pressures with it, especially perhaps for young girls; and threats to the very survival of the planet. It's unlikely that they'll look back from their sixties and seventies and describe these times as grey in quite the same way as some of my male contemporaries did. It's unlikely that their grandmothers were/are living in a tiny 'two-up/two-down' terraced cottage with a fireplace that needs black-leading, no bathroom and a shared toilet across the yard where torn-up squares of newspaper hang on a string. Indeed, their grandparents may not be resident in the UK.

So how did they fare, this diverse group of women whose beginnings in life were not privileged, but who *did* have the capacity to 'succeed' through the possession of the kind of capital that is supposedly highly valued within the education system. How did these clever younger women from relatively modest backgrounds experience finding their way in the world, finding love, 'making it' to middle-classdom? In telling their stories in a variety of creative but accessible ways, these UK-based contributors may have a distinctively 'British' accent (not inflected by the upper-class tones sometimes inferred from that epithet, but perhaps expressing grief, sadness, joy or other powerful emotions through irony or understatement or else by 'speaking back' to racist constructions of the justifiable anger Black subjects express). In relation to narrative theory, Ivor Goodson wonders whether 'stories' are too egalitarian, too inclusive, for an educational system that seeks to select and foster certain groups but not others. In response to this question, and in seeking to be inclusive of marginalised voices, this collection aims to appeal to *all* academic staff and students (including those from families which don't have a long his-

right to stay was guaranteed by the Immigration Act of 1971, but they were forced under changes to immigration laws in 2012 to prove continuous residence in the UK since 1973, something that was almost impossible for many who had not kept detailed records. As a result, some were denied access to state healthcare and to housing, were made redundant from their jobs, threatened with deportation, detained, and in some cases wrongly deported and then refused re-entry to the UK.

tory of higher education), as well as to those not necessarily in higher education at all, whatever their nationality and wherever they currently reside. At the same time, as autoethnographies rather than other forms of 'storying the self', lived experience is viewed through an analytical lens, making clear at a time of increasing societal fragmentation, polarisation and inequality, the connections between what C. Wright Mills termed 'personal troubles' and 'public issues'.

Through negotiating the changing terrain of the second half of the twentieth century and graduating to our current places in the 'Brave New World' of the twenty-first, we clever girls could be said in one sense to have fulfilled our parents' aspirations. What was lost in the process and what found? Contributors' stories focus on what is most salient for each of us at this time in relation to the formation of classed, gendered and racialized subjectivities. For all of us, getting to where we are involved 'leaving home' in more significant ways than those integral to simply reaching adulthood. My father never talked about 'his war' but there were phrases whose origins could be traced to that experience. 'Forward my men, I'm behind you!' he'd sometimes quip at cowardly or incompetent political leaders.[2] Or 'Three steps forward, two steps back!' when frustrations hit. Hints that life was characterised by struggling to achieve something against the odds. Particularly for 'ordinary' folk, subject to forces beyond their control, to the whims of the 'powers that be', to set-backs to what had seemed like achievable goals. As I was writing the proposal for this book, commemorations to mark a hundred years since the end of the first world 'war to end all wars' were taking place. At the same time, post-Second-World-War alliances aimed at establishing a lasting peace were under threat from the rise of far-right groups in the UK, Europe and the USA—events that would have been unimaginable to my parents as they looked forward to a world made safer for their daughters' generation.

All parents want 'better' for their children as they find their own ways in life. I suspect that while we didn't necessarily appreciate at the time the costs involved in the various transitions and transformations we were

[2] A cultural reference that lives on: on 27 March 2019, Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's representative in the Brexit negotiations, tweeted of Nigel Farage's minimal participation in the 'Leave' march: 'You remind me more & more of Field Marshal Haig in *Blackadder*, sitting safely in his office, while his people are walking in the cold & the rain'.

undertaking, we set off with some trepidation but also with hope for a brighter future. In these dangerous and uncertain times, in addition to the resources we have accumulated and deployed so effectively to get us this far, we all need more hope. Especially perhaps, my 'younger sisters' here who are still making their own ways in the world. I hope contributing to this collection gives them a boost on their travels. I hope the collection offers readers a greater understanding of the complex ways in which relations of classed, gendered and racialised inequalities are re/produced and experienced.

Loughborough, UK Jackie Goode
July 2019

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Notes on Contributors

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Victoria Adukwei Bulley is a poet, writer and filmmaker. She has appeared on BBC Radio 4 *Woman's Hour* and her work has appeared in *The Poetry Review*. She was shortlisted for the Brunel University African Poetry Prize in 2016, is an Eric Gregory Award winner and has held residencies in the US, Brazil and the V&A Museum in London. Victoria is the director of *Mother Tongues*, an intergenerational poetry, film and translation project supported by Arts Council England and Autograph ABP.

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Jackie Goode is Visiting Fellow in Qualitative Research in the School of Social Sciences at Loughborough University. She has worked on a variety of large-scale funded sociological and social policy research projects in the areas of health service delivery, the student experience of higher education and the gendered allocation of household finances within low-income and over-indebted families, publishing extensively in each of these areas. Her recent publications are autoethnographies of family relationships and sociality.

Emily Green is a writer and English lecturer living in Cardiff and currently teaching at Weston College, Weston super Mare in the South West of England. She has an MA in Creative Writing and was shortlisted for both the Terry Hetherington and Robin Reeves Prize for Young Writers. Her fiction has appeared in anthologies and literary magazines.

Tracey Loughran is Reader in History at the University of Essex. She is a historian of twentieth-century Britain with particular interests in the interaction of ideas and experiences of body, mind and self. Her publications include *Shell Shock and Medical Culture in First World War Britain* (2017). In the pages of history books, she learnt that difference is a source of strength; that knowledge and creativity are the foundations of resilience; and that if you know where you come from, it's easier to see all the different places you might go and all the many ways you might get there.

Claire Mitchell is a Scotswoman who graduated from the University of Stirling with a BSc in Psychology and from the University of Strathclyde with an MSc in Clinical Health Psychology. Currently based in Glasgow, she works for the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Trust (BIRT) as a rehabilitation support worker. Her research interests are focused on neuropsychology and psychological wellbeing.

Kristin O'Donnell Her work focuses on the intersections of history, memory and art with a particular focus on the performativity of memory, embodiment, representation, identity and the politics of war commemoration. Previous research has explored the creation of early heritage sites and their role in identity formation in the nineteenth century, and the cultural memory of the 1984 Miners' Strike. She is working towards a PhD through an AHRC TECHNE NPIF funded studentship entitled 'Participatory Practices of Memory: Memorialising the Great War in Britain during the Centenary Moment' at the University of Brighton, in collaboration with Dover Arts Development. Kristin is passionate about social justice and has been appointed as a Cumberland Lodge scholar to support the work they do in relation to public engagement.

Meena Rajput worked as a brand marketing manager in the action sports industry for thirteen years before her current job at 'Greenpeace', where she is Diversity & Inclusion lead and Creative Facilitation Network Manager. She is also an activist, having recently sailed to the Antarctic to take action against the krill fishing industry and urge the Antarctic Ocean Commission to create an Antarctic Ocean Sanctuary.

Melanie Reynolds is a historian and an associate lecturer at Oxford Brookes University, specialising in women's working-class history. She has authored a number of articles on women's working-class history and these have appeared in many journals as well as the book *Infant Mortality and Working-Class Child Care, 1850–1899* with Palgrave Macmillan.

Motsabi Rooper was born in Brixton and raised there and in Camden. She studied International Development and Latin American studies at the University of Leeds before going on to work in Guatemala for four

years in the field of justice and human rights. Living there, she was struck by the similarities between its society and the stories her family had shared with her of South Africa under apartheid. She recently explored this in an MA at SOAS,[1] where she focussed on critical perspectives to International Relations and found her voice. Her research interests include the role of discourse in the repression of civic freedoms. Black feminism is one of the frameworks that helps her to make sense of the world.

Liz Thomas has now retired from a career in education in the UK and Kenya which included being a primary, secondary and tertiary teacher and completing an MA in Applied Linguistics before becoming a staff development officer and then assistant principal of an FE College. Later she set up a training business offering courses in educational management before spending the last twenty-five years of her career as a teacher educator at Nottingham Trent and Bedford universities. She is writing a memoir.

Sarah Ward is a counsellor and psychotherapist in private practice in the north of England. Prior to qualifying as a therapist, she worked as a qualitative social science researcher and in the voluntary sector in management and policy roles. Her writing takes the form of both poetry and prose, particularly focussing on memoir.

Christa Welsh is a MBACP accredited consultant psychotherapist, in private practice for over twenty years, specialising in presenting issues of Attachment and Intergenerational trauma. She has a background in researching and leading family development and psychosocial-education projects in the voluntary and charity sectors. She was awarded a Winston Churchill Research Fellowship for her educational activism in developing preventative and supportive models for teen parents in Europe and the USA. Her psychosocial performative research and writing is centred on the embodied experience of Black women of African ancestry, informed by Autoethnographic practice, Intersectionality and Womanism.

[1] The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Through her research, she examines the interwoven strands of racialised embodiment and the tension of otherness, in order to reveal other ways of knowing and knowledge production that challenge normative discourses.

1

Introduction

Jackie Goode

What's the Problem?

Let's begin with *class*. In 2001, Walkerdine and fellow contributors to *Growing up Girl* observed that in examining social class, they were writing about something that refuses to go away. Four years later, Reay (2005) commented on the fact that in contemporary British society, social class is "not only etched into culture, it is still deeply etched into our psyches, despite class awareness and class consciousness being seen as 'a thing of the past'" (p. 911). As if to illustrate this view, Hey (2006) describes being told to 'get over it' (p. 295). Another year on and Gillies (2007) refers to class as the 'elephant in the room' (p. 19). Three years after that, Taylor (2010) suggested that the intersections of class with gender, ethnicity and sexuality were still pressing. Four years later, Boylorn and Orbe (2014) observed that communication scholars have been slow to examine class as a salient cultural issue. Three years later, Hanley (2017) observed that the class 'coffin' is still empty, and most recently, Morgan (2019) observed that "understandings in class terms have not gone away and still, perhaps

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increasingly, form part of public discourse" (p. 8). We know from all of Diane Reay's research that the links between class and inequality endure, but as she says "We need more understanding of how social class is actually lived, of how it informs our inner worlds, to complement research on how it shapes our life chances in the outer world" (2005, p. 913).

While many of the authors above challenged hitherto purely economic analyses of class by bringing *gender* onto the agenda, the 2016 European Union Membership Referendum result ('Brexit') in Britain and Donald Trump's election as president in the USA brought increasing levels of inequality, stark divisions between people and shocking examples of a lack of social justice into sharp relief, foregrounding important questions about *race*. In Britain, post-Brexit analyses often featured references to a post-industrial 'left-behind' working class using definitions that were not only male by default but that also failed to acknowledge the hidden constructions of whiteness that underpinned them. Critiques of such analyses from postcolonial and critical race scholars uncovered these assumptions, at the same time raising questions about the role of immigration in the construction of class positions and identities and of their transmission across generations, about how immigration both defines the composition of the working class and operates as a potential dividing line within it, and about how race and racism are constructed and become manifest. We also need more understanding, then, of how intersections of class, gender and ethnicity are actually lived, of how they inform our inner worlds and how they shape our life chances in the outer world. Autoethnography as a genre of writing and as an increasingly popular mode of inquiry (e.g. Griffin 2012; Boylorn 2013; Turner et al. 2018) offers huge potential for understanding the lived experience of macro structures, systems and processes.

Recruiting contributors able to illuminate such complexities through written autoethnographies posed a number of challenges, not least in terms of selection criteria and the definitions that informed them. Recent publication of a number of working class and minority ethnic 'voices', such as the essays in Nikesh Shukla's *The Good Immigrant*, Kit de Waal's *Common People* anthology, Kerry Hudson's memoir *Lowborn* and Candice Carty-Williams' novel *Queenie*, inevitably attracted responses on social media that challenged the notion that published writers could still lay

claim to a working-class identity. It is an essentially reductive and unhelpful argument, as Hey (2006) and Childers (2002) suggest (see further discussion by these authors in my own autoethnography in Chap. 5), not least because it rests on simplistic conceptualisations of subjectivity. Nevertheless, one has to start somewhere. Since class had been the first 'key' that had enabled me to start analysing my own lived experiences as an undergraduate from a working-class family, I had thought initially in terms of identifying women like me who had been the first in their family to access higher education. But I quickly recognised that this is an inadequate indicator of an enduring class sensibility/consciousness, especially since parent(s) may go to university as 'mature' students, rather than 'automatically' progressing to university from school; or contributors may have one parent who did access higher education while the other didn't. In any case, being a graduate no longer offers the opportunities higher education opened up for me, bringing mobility but also personal costs. Intersections of class with other forms of structural inequality, stratification systems (such as caste) and processes of subject formation including migration also make it clear that class may not be experienced as a singular or primary site of identification (Mama 1995). Further, there is the fact that people sometimes experience themselves 'performatively'—becoming conscious of how they are variably classified/classify themselves according to context, deploying or being ascribed different aspects of their identities *in interaction* with others, including institutional actors (within what Skeggs refers to as "systems of inscription, exchange, valuing, institutionalization and perspective (that) provide the conditions of possibility for being read by others in the relationships that are formed between groups", 2004, p. 2). And then there are temporal and spatial dimensions which mean that specific aspects of identity become heightened at significant times of psychological, emotional or geographical transition or during periods of disruption to a life course which make attachments and subject formations more tenuous, fluid and destabilising. To try to capture such changes over time—both historical time and experiences of time within a life course—I also wanted to identify women of my own and subsequent generations.

The crucial criterion became whether potential contributors had developed a consciousness of inhabiting what Reay (2005, p. 912) calls a

'psychic economy' of class, gender and ethnicity and of how they intersect in complex ways that position the individual in a 'liminal space' even while sometimes confounding their ability accurately to analyse 'in situ' how different elements are operating in any given encounter. Occupying such a space develops an awareness that informs and infuses everyday life in a pervasive sense and engenders the kinds of tensions that can arise from 'managing' experiences of transitions (e.g. leaving family behind) and liminality (e.g. 'passing'). The tensions may manifest in 'invisible' embodied/affective ways, perhaps as a constituent element of broader social relations, or within everyday interactions or in the form of an 'inner dialogue' that makes itself heard in certain situations—all of which impact on perceptions, actions, hopes, dreams and aspirations realised or abandoned. Familiarity with such a 'psychic economy' was explored in conversations with potential contributors drawn from long-standing and new contacts both personal and professional, from 'word-of-mouth' suggestions/introductions and from those identified via social media 'trails'. While keeping an eye on age range, but without having had a 'tokenistic' agenda in operation, or knowing what the specificities of their experiences might be beyond the broad outlines we discussed, those invited to contribute had the capacity to generate not only stories of being clever girls but also insights originating in different and intersecting experiences of class, age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, country, region and sexuality. Which aspects of any of these they chose to focus on was left entirely to them. As a genre of writing, autoethnography can take a variety of forms, including that of the traditional academic journal article, semi-fictionalised accounts, short story, poetry, 'layered' accounts, 'bricolage', 'fragments', performance autoethnographies, craftwork and the use of visual images, all contributing to the making of a cultural artefact. Again, what style of writing contributors chose was left to them.

Conceptually, the collection is organised around notions of 'formations' and 'developments' through time and across place/space, in what I think of as three 'braided' strands:

- the developments that take place across an *individual life* in processes of 'becoming'—examined through contributors' autoethnographies

- the *social, educational and geopolitical developments* over historical time that provided the backdrop to contributors' lives and helped shape their subjectivities; and
- developments in *academic theorisations* of class, gender, race and other systems of power and processes of subject formation during the period in question, traced here with the aim of providing the reader with some analytic 'tools' with which to further contextualise and theorise contributors' accounts

In line with an autoethnographic approach, concrete examples of how these individual, social and theoretical strands intertwine in different contexts are given here and there in the form of personal illustrative 'fragments'.

The Structure of the Book

Chapter 2 lays the ground for the autoethnographies by providing some context to contributors' lives in the form of the social, educational and geopolitical developments that provided the backdrop to them and by offering some analytical 'tools' in the form of theorisations of the production of the classed/gendered/racialised subject. Thinking about subjects as being 'produced' is to recognise the connections between distinctive kinds of subjectivity and the political, structural, cultural and historical conditions which give rise to such 'formations'. After outlining some of these 'conditions' (changing educational policies, patterns of immigration in the post-war period), the chapter looks at the way predominantly sociological theorisations of classificatory systems have progressed—from a focus on social class as a form of stratification (and in particular on how 'the working class' has been conceived of and represented); through approaches which distinguished between 'the economic' and 'the cultural' (with the latter seen as critical in the analysis of gendered and racialised inequalities); through the importance of psychological and 'affective' factors in the formation of subjects; the concept of 'intersectionality'; the historical legacies of colonialism and global movements of peoples through migration and how these are integral to conceptualisations

of class, gender, race and practices of 'othering'; to approaches that focus more broadly on space/place, movement and time.

The overview Chap. 2 offers is by no means definitive or exhaustive but is designed to provide a 'work box' containing some tools to enable the reader to place the stories being told in a structural and cultural context and to 'think with' about the similarities and differences the stories reveal, whether these relate to discourses of class and how these are internalised, or to age, ethnicity, culture, inter/national or regional/local spaces and places, belonging, movements and disruptions, institutional contexts, 'psychic economies', issues related to embodiment or processes of intergenerational transmission. There is much here for academic and student sociologists, psychologists, historians and human geographers; those teaching/studying English, communication and performance studies; teachers in training and counselling/psychotherapy educators; as well as professional practitioners in these areas, writers and 'lay' readers. It's perhaps worth saying, however, that the autoethnographies (which appear in age order from eldest to youngest) stand alone, and some readers may wish to go straight to them. Others may wish to look at autoethnography as a method before doing so and Chap. 3 covers some aspects of this approach.

Chapter 3 examines three specific aspects of autoethnography. A great deal has already been written about this kind of inquiry, documenting its history, its growth, its central tenets, its perceived strengths and shortcomings. Nevertheless, it is an approach that is currently less well-developed in the British than in the North/American and Antipodean contexts (perhaps due not only to a positivist tradition within the social science context but to what Zadie Smith suggests in *Feel Free* is also a literary tradition, characterised by what she refers to as a particularly British moral queasiness about departing from Shakespeare's breed of 'impersonality'). The conceptualisation of autoethnography used here is as research within the ethnographic tradition, rather than exclusively espousing Ellis and Bochner's (2000) call for a "narrative text [that] refuses to abstract and explain" (p. 4). However, I see these two forms of autoethnography, commonly referred to as 'analytic' and 'evocative', respectively, as being on a continuum, the crucial component with both being the links that are made, explicitly or implicitly, between the personal

and wider social and cultural issues, particularly those pertaining to a social justice agenda.

In formulating autoethnography as research, we could describe it by 'translating' more conventional research terminology into autoethnographic terms—for example, as ethnography in which 'the field' is the self. Chapter 3 uses this trope to focus on three components of autoethnographic inquiry. It discusses the status of the 'data' that autoethnography 'collects'—that is 'personal experience'; the 'method' of data collection upon which the researcher-self/self-researcher is reliant—that is, the operation of memory; and the production of a 'report' about what was 'found' (uncovered or revealed) in the field—where the 'report' (autoethnographic text, performance etc.) eventuates from what is conceived of here as a process of 'cultural production' or 'making practice' referred to as 'poiesis'. So Chap. 3 is divided into three sections: the 'experiencing' self and the nature and status of personal experience; the 're/membering' self, where remembering is conceived of as a creative and imaginative act rather than a technical activity involving simple recall or retrieval; and a 'making' self through which an autoethnographic text is conceived of as being 'brought into being' through 'poeisis'.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 comprise the autoethnographies themselves. Autoethnography as a kind of cultural production differs from other kinds of 'life writing'. If 'doing autoethnography' is a form of research committed to analysing the connections between the self and wider social and cultural issues and to drawing these out in the 'artefacts' we produce, we are inevitably engaged in theorising. When discussing the role of theory, the anthropologist Eckert (2016) suggests that in examining the relationalities that shape our world, we are addressing "the constitution of alterity in social and political relations" (p. 242). What we need, she suggests, are concepts, methodology and theory that are capable of both reflecting upon sameness and recognising our different ways of perceiving and conceptualising the world, inflected as they are by the relations of inequality through which we face each other. Critical theory aims to provide analytical tools with which to reveal how relationalities are obscured through the presumption of 'given' (racialised, cultural, gendered or religious) differences (p. 245). Such theorising (what Xiang 2016 refers to as 'theory as vision')

has the capacity not only to elucidate and articulate the actual but also the possible—the alternative that has remained silenced and unsayable. As Evaristo (2013) says, "to narrate our stories ourselves is to disseminate our experiences, presence and imaginations *on our own terms*" (p. 297) [my italics], something she uses fiction to do. As contributors' biographies indicate, they come from a number of different academic disciplines and they are all using their own theories and ways of knowing to illuminate some of the relationalities, previously revealed and/or obscured, to which Eckert refers.

In Chap. 4 'On Be(com)ing Clever', Liz Thomas recounts how, as the youngest child of a Nottingham working-class family, she navigated her education from failed eleven-plus to master's degree. First in her family to go to university, she was 'scripted' by her father to "go out there and show them". She and the few others who transferred 'late' to grammar school at the age of thirteen were reminded that they were "just an experiment". Using diary extracts, school reports and discussions with her older sister, her account considers how family difficulties, the working-class mores of the 1960s and 1970s and the Cuban missile crisis all affected her transition to middle-class status and a career in education.

In Chap. 5 'Too Clever by Half', my own autoethnography foregrounds my mother's role in my experience of being a 'Scholarship Girl', tracing the intergenerational transmission of gender, class and educational achievement. There is a noticeable feature common to a number of women writers of my generation: that of the unkind, withholding, even cruel mother who is unloving towards, 'exploits' or otherwise tries to 'thwart' her daughter. In telling my tale through narrative, poems and diary entries, I paint a more sympathetic picture of my own mother and her travails in attempting to escape a stigmatised self and to achieve the middle-class status which I now enjoy.

In Chap. 6 'Common Ground', Nell Farrell shows how her father was influential in shaping her sense of her own 'cleverness' and how his story is integral to the formation of her class identity. 'In conversation with' Richard Hoggart and Lynsey Hanley, she explores the intergenerational transmission of a class sensibility, examining along the way where reading, football and gender fit into formations of class, place and community.

In Chap. 7 'From "Too Womanish, Girl!" to Clever Womanish Woman', Christa Welsh's 'Blackgirl autoethnography' empowers her to do the 'homework of self-construction'. It is told from the 'Womanish' standpoint of a British African Caribbean woman. In it, she examines the interwoven strands of racialised embodiment and the tensions of 'otherness' related to experiences of gendered racism and classism and the ways this has impacted on her identity and sense of belonging as a 'clever Black girl' in Grenada and England. In revealing ways of knowing that challenge normative discourses, she aims to create a space for listening to and understanding an 'other's' lived experience and to offer the transformative potential of moving away from processes of 'othering' towards a universalist place of common humanity.

In Chap. 8 '"I stand with them" … United and Secure', Melanie Reynolds maps her life from her move from the West Riding of Yorkshire to university in the south-east of England as a mature student, recounting how she navigated her class identity amongst a predominantly southern and middle-class student/academic body. University offered the chance to shape her own destiny—initially by attempting to edit her past by 'erasing' her working-class identity. Studying feminist-oriented histories of class and gender, however, revealed links between the past and her present which challenged any need to purge her working-class roots. Re-examining the lived experiences of nineteenth-century working-class women uncovered not stories of victimhood, vulnerability and ignorance but 'hidden histories' of power, independence, control, capability and works-based 'rights'—a 'new narrative' providing 'foundational knowledge' on which to build a more secure working-class academic identity in the present.

In Chap. 9 'Things You Wouldn't Say to Your Daughter', Panya Banjoko relates the journey of a descendant of eco-migrant pioneers from the Windrush generation—a generation that believed education to be a route to social mobility. What class was/am I when colour speaks so visibly, she asks? She speaks for girls like her who had to learn a new language and culture before accessing the education system. Through vignettes and poetry, her story tells of negotiating negative stereotypes only to be marginalised, of being an elective mute, of her relationship

with her father, and the hostile environment that surrounded her before she eventually took her place in the academy.

In Chap. 10 'Being the One Good Thing', Sarah Ward explores the ways in which cleverness provided one white working-class girl with an escape from some of the pressures of growing up female: a way of masking the pain of 'failing' at adolescent explorations of love and sexuality and an alternative to the perceived weakness of traditional femininity—while bringing its own set of pressures and projections. It examines a working-class family's proud expectations of a clever girl's apparent potential to fulfil others' fantasies. What happens when a clever girl grows up to be an ordinary woman who doesn't manifest the specific and exceptional 'success' that others projected on to her future? Snapshots of the relationship between the author and her mother provide an insight into the ways in which the escape from working-class life afforded by cleverness can be a complex interaction of growth and guilt, happiness and loss.

In Chap. 11 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place', Jan Bradford shares a 'well-told' family story: "Mum says I was always a good wee girl … but a clever wee girl too. I could read before I went to school. Teacher said I could read as well as any of the Primary 7 girls when I joined my Primary 1B classmates at a Scottish state primary school in a steadily declining mining town in the mid-1970s. But one day, when I am still only 5 years old, Teacher tells Mum she is worried about me. I have become very quiet—*I am isolated*. I no longer read fluently—*I stutter*. I no longer write—*I struggle to hold a pencil in my hand*. Mum and Teacher nod and agree … *Yes … you can't be too careful … there is a fine line between genius and madness … and she is such a good wee girl too…*" And so the well-told family story about her little 'clever-good-girl' self was born.

In Chap. 12 '"Must Try Harder": Anxiety, Self-Shaping and Structures of Feeling, Then and Now', Tracey Loughran reads old school reports. She is shocked by the differences she sees between the mature, hard-working, responsible, clever and well-liked eleven-year-old and the sulky, silent, withdrawn twelve-year-old secondary school girl. The coded class prejudice of her teachers becomes clear. Thinking back on her history of self-harm, she wonders at the damage caused by the education that has also brought her much of what she values in her current life. Could earlier unhappy heterosexual relationships be viewed as self-harm of another

kind rather than just part of growing up? She explores intersections of class, gender, psychological health and education in her life story, drawing on an 'archive of the self' that includes school reports and fiction. Autoethnography and memory work are used to place the self within social and political structures, including the current epidemic of self-harm among adolescent girls, with the aim of de-individualising the mental health struggles of today's 'clever girls'.

In Chap. 13 'Single Indian woman; Very Accomplished but Can't Make Round Chapatis', Meena Rajput's story is of a British Indian woman growing up in a town where her family was one of only three non-white families and where she and her brother were the only children of colour. It is a story of expectations, duties, hopes and dreams lost and found. Her parents' immigrant story was of 'downward mobility' and of ambiguous status in relation to social class. Her story contains both familiar and unfamiliar elements—parental aspirations for a daughter to be accomplished in both classroom and kitchen, to enter a profession and to marry into a good family. She has 'failed' and 'succeeded': failed to conform to 'traditional' notions of what being 'clever' as a girl entailed; failed to 'please' her teachers, who communicated highly confusing messages about her abilities, but succeeded in making her mother and extended family proud despite following her very own path to fulfilment.

In Chap. 14 '"But you're not *really* foreign": An Autoethnography of a Working-Class Canadian "Passing" in England', Kristin O'Donnell explores her lived experience as a young working-class Canadian immigrant in twenty-first-century Britain, drawing on memory work and autoethnography to interrogate notions of class belonging inflected by race. As an immigrant during a period of heightened tension over immigration, her position as a white native English speaker from a former Commonwealth country mitigated her 'foreignness'. Instead of being conceptualised as 'other', she is able to 'pass' in both working- and middle-class surroundings. But her 'double migration' of class and country—one always slightly obscuring the other and making her hard to place—constitutes a liminal and unstable space. Through reflexive vignettes, she charts a transition from self-conscious working-class Canadian to comfortably passing in middle-class academic environments. Through her status as 'not-quite-different' and yet 'not-quite-British', she offers a

broader perspective on questions of class, race, identity and the inclusions and exclusions that arise from such categories.

In Chap. 15 'Untitled', Motsabi Rooper's upbringing as the daughter of a Black South African father who worked with ex-offenders and a white British mother who worked as BBC television producer presented her with dilemmas around which world she 'properly' inhabited. Her auto-ethnographic story traces how she experienced education as a struggle to reconcile her parents' unspoken aspirations for her to be 'middle class', with the contradictory messages she received from her peers, teachers and society about being a person of colour. It encapsulates the loneliness she felt in navigating this and her struggle for the ultimate ticket to what she thought would be acceptance and belonging—becoming a 'clever girl'.

In Chap. 16 'Is this *yours*? … Did *you* write this?', Victoria Adukwei Bulley does not lay claim to a working-class background but her experience of educational achievement was accompanied at school by a characteristic refrain from teachers in response to any work of hers which was of a particularly high standard. The underlying assumption seemed to be that being a high achiever and a Black girl were mutually exclusive. The acquisition of a first and a higher degree belie this. Nevertheless, her efforts to build a freelance creative career in London can only be undertaken by still living at home and these efforts certainly don't offer any guarantee of the kind of security her parents' paths gave them. That early refrain established an awareness that has grown over time of others' low expectations of her abilities that continues to inform and shape the way she moves through the world as a Black woman—movements illustrated here through poems.

In Chap. 17 'A Letter to My Younger Self', Claire Mitchell uses a letter format to highlight experiences of growing up as a working-class 'clever girl' struggling through poverty to achieve 'success' and 'security' within/through higher education. She observes that growing access to higher education has been promoted as a means of reducing class inequalities through improving social mobility, but she describes a contrasting reality in which inequities are exacerbated by scarcity of money and time, and in which 'techniques of selfhood' take their toll. Moving between past and the present, she compares childhood memories of her mother's time in education with her own experience at university. Connecting personal

experiences with sociological issues in order to challenge discourses of upward social mobility, she illuminates what achieving 'success' looks like in practice. Her letter raises a question about the promises of higher education as a route to security for those from poorer backgrounds: 'Is it all worth it?'

In Chap. 18 'Fractured Lives and Border Crossings', Emily Green's story features two kinds of 'transition': a geographical one that gave impetus to her cognisance of class transition and notions of belonging; and a significant conversation with an educator that highlighted the part that mental health may have played in her crossing from one side of the educational fence to the other. Tracing a path across a shifting geographic, linguistic and emotional landscape of hills and valleys, her chapter recounts a state of flux and unease as she moved through the class and education systems, dealt with her father's suicide in her early twenties and began to understand the impact that has had on her professional career as a further education lecturer in a seaside town with a low socio-economic profile. Through its telling, she is not only re-claiming her early promise as a 'clever girl' but challenging stereotypes of who can and who should 'achieve' educational success.

It is perhaps worth saying that while autoethnography has been seen as a genre of writing associated with accounts of pain and trauma, this is not an essential defining feature. The book is not simply a collection of 'misery memoirs'. In Starmans' (2016) autoethnographic story of class transition, told from her position as a middle-aged woman, she writes "I fear that I have depicted only the bleakest parts of my family life and that I never got to discuss the joy, love, humour and wisdom that were also part of my upbringing, or the close bonds I share with my parents and my brother today because we have endured these hardships and managed to grow beyond them, together" (p. 65). These contributors are at different stages in their lives, occupying different positions from which to take a perspective, and painful experiences inevitably appear since we are telling of classed, gendered and racialised 'hidden injuries' (Sennett and Cobb 1972). A major strength of autoethnography, however, is its ability to capture complexity, ambiguity, paradox and nuance and there is plenty of all of these here. But alongside the paradoxes, tensions and pain,

celebratory moments, reconciliations and humour feature too. All of these are features of the landscape in which we meet in this collection.

In a sense, we *did* 'meet'. As editor, I had had conversations with contributors via email, text and telephone—with some, along the way, acting as a sounding board as they planned and wrote; and with all, feeding back my responses, once first drafts were submitted. Very little formal 'editing' was actually required. Once completed, we shared our autoethnographies so that each writer could compare their own experiences to others'; reflect on similarities and differences; discover resonances; be surprised, stimulated, shocked, moved; have expectations overturned—in other words, so that we could learn from each other—and then we shared our responses via a 'chain' of emails. This 'conversation' is reproduced in Chap. 19 as a kind of 'modelling' for readers of the power of autoethnography. For the contributors them(our)selves, this process felt transformative, turning the 'making' of the book into a collaborative autoethnography in itself that embodied more than the sum of its parts. The space between the book's 'covers' became a place in which a diverse group of women met, as Eckert (ibid) suggested, to examine the relationalities that shape our world, to address the constitution of alterity in social and political relations, to reflect upon sameness and recognise our different ways of perceiving and conceptualising the world, inflected as they are by the relations of inequality through which we face the world and each other—and to be empowered in the process.

The conclusions of Chap. 20 reflect, in the light of contributors' stories and the conversation that followed, on the potential of bringing diverse autoethnographic voices together in a collection like this, for illuminating: the lived experiences of intersections of class, gender and ethnicity as experienced by three generations of 'clever' girls/women; notions of transition, 'liminality' and becoming; and imaginings of what it might mean now to be 'ordinary'. Lewis (2009) has consistently posed the question of how "in coming together to create feminist spaces, [we] can constitute the terms and experiences of belonging to that 'community-in-the-making'. And still enable dialogue despite – or rather through – our differences" (p. 6). The spaces she is referring to are those "where the erstwhile unspeakable may be spoken and the established norms of intelligibility (whatever their specific shape in specific sites and arena) may no

longer provide the traction determining what is deemed legible and comprehensible" (p. 8). Once again, I hope that this 'assemblage', made up of a rich and stimulating set of autoethnographic stories set in their broader social, cultural and economic contexts, will act as a 'jumping off point' for readers' own memories, reflections, analyses, 'visionary theorising' and writing—a transformative 'line of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari 1980) perhaps, away from ever-widening inequalities and towards new connections.

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2

The Classed, Gendered and Racialised Subject

Jackie Goode

The Educational Context

Huge changes have taken place in educational provision over the period in which our clever girls grew up. Before the Second World War, eighty-eight per cent of young people in Britain left school by the age of fourteen. After the war, education took a central role in social reconstruction. The 1944 Education Act, the 1946 National Insurance Act and the 1948 National Health Service Act constituted the three pillars of the welfare state (Tomlinson 2002). The Education Act introduced a three-tier system of secondary education (grammar, secondary modern and secondary technical schools), designed to channel people into the kinds of education best suited to their 'innate' abilities, with the highest rewards going to those who possessed a sufficient 'intelligence quotient' (I.Q.) to pass the '11-plus' examination at the end of the primary years and gain admission to the 'academic' curriculum of the grammar school and the potential it offered for access to higher education.

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For successful candidates from working-class backgrounds, the 11-plus offered the potential for upward social mobility, even though girls had to do much better than boys to obtain a place (Deem 1981), an element of social engineering justified on the grounds of gendered development rates. In practice, working-class children gaining access to grammar school were in the minority and children of colour even more so. Indeed, the 'hereditarianism' upon which the I.Q. test was based was not only essentialist in relation to class and gender but racist in both its conception and its outcomes, with genetic factors being seen to account for poorer outcomes on the part of minority ethnic groups (Lowe 1997).

Post-war, in common with most other European countries, Britain's labour shortages were met from a variety of sources: refugees, displaced persons and ex-prisoners of war from Europe (Cole and Virdee 2006) plus other European nationals (Sivanandan 1976). The overwhelming majority of migrants to Britain at this time, however, were from the Republic of Ireland, the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean (Miles 1989). In 1962, a new Immigration Act restricted 'non-white' labour from both the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean but immigration from the Republic of Ireland continued (Miles and Phizacklea 1984).

For minority ethnic groups, categorisations of social origins are shaped by the migration trajectories, pre-migration characteristics and settlement patterns of their (migrant) parents (Platt 2005), but the ways that class, educational qualifications and ethnicity interact differed according to ethnic group (Platt 2007). The picture was a complex one: Asian school pupils/students were seen as contrasting with their 'disruptive' Caribbean peers by their presentation as seemingly 'passive' and 'studious'—an image applied in particular to Asian girls and one which was interpreted as simultaneously positive in terms of the 'ideal' learner and negative as reflecting their supposed cultural subordination (Cole and Blair 2006). The image of an 'ideal Asian pupil' did not prevent widespread low expectations of their abilities and ambitions, however (Brah and Minhas 1985, p. 76), resulting at times in inadequate or inappropriate careers advice (Mirza 1992). But outcomes were not the same for all Asians: while Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils were shown to be underachieving, Indian pupils performed well in relation to all their peers (Gillborn and Gipps 1996). Despite the heterogeneous class structure of

the migrating populations (Heath and Ridge 1983), they not only came to occupy semi-skilled and unskilled positions in the English labour market (Daniel 1968) but found themselves disproportionately concentrated in manual work characterised by shift working, unsocial hours, low pay and an unpleasant working environment (Smith 1977).

In 1985, the Swann Report, 'Education for All' suggested that all children should be prepared for life in a multicultural society, but this did not give rise to a radical rethinking of the curriculum or of pedagogy. Extending the study of different cultural customs (music, cuisine etc.) to all students represented a form of exoticization which "merely served to reinforce the notion that these cultures were indeed 'Other' and drew the boundary more firmly between 'Them' the 'immigrants' or 'foreigners' and 'Us' the 'real' British" (Cole and Blair 2006, p. 80). Criticisms of multicultural education led to the introduction of Race Relations Advisors into schools, whose role was to promote anti-racist policies and teaching practices. Nevertheless, the racialisation of children from minority ethnic groups continued into the twenty-first century as evidenced by the over-representation, particularly of Caribbean-heritage children, in the composition of school exclusions and differential exam results and employment patterns, constituting what Heath and McMahon (1997) refer to as an 'ethnic penalty'—that is, a higher risk of unemployment or a lower chance of a professional/managerial outcome for an equally qualified member of a minority ethnic group when compared with the white majority. As Platt (2007) remarks, accounts attempting to explain the success of what are commonly regarded as the more successful of the UK's minority ethnic groups (Indian/East African Asian and Chinese) have often stressed group-specific attachment to education (Modood 2004; Archer and Francis 2006), but the commitment to education evidenced by rates of 'staying on' among 'less successful' minority groups such as Caribbeans and Pakistanis (DfES 2004; Heath and Yu 2005) belie this. By investigating patterns of post-migration geographical dispersion which affect access to different forms of 'ethnic capital', Platt demonstrates that the 'ethnic penalty' is a more complex phenomenon, made up of a combination of characteristics that vary with ethnicity (such as parental class background) and discrimination (see also the 2018 'Secondary Education and Social Change in the United Kingdom since

1945' project briefing paper on Race and Immigration, https://sesc.hist.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Briefing-paper-Race-and-immigration.pdf).

The development of comprehensive education from the 1960s appeared to signal an end to education as a vehicle for the perpetuation of gendered/classed/racialised divisions and raised the hope that the talents of the whole population could be realised. However, under Conservative and New Labour governments, the introduction of market principles led to fragmentation of earlier social welfare programmes, and policies based on human capital theory identified the role of education as contributing primarily to the improvement of the economy. Education became a competitive enterprise and a commodity, rather than a preparation for a democratic society. By the 1990s, social and economic inequality had increased dramatically (Tomlinson 2002) and barriers that disadvantage working-class and minority ethnic students within the schooling and higher education systems alike ensure the continuing reproduction of inequality into the present (Reay 2017), including via the over-representation of Black Caribbean and mixed white and Black pupils in school exclusion statistics (Timpson 2019) and a pay gap in UK higher education that disadvantages academics from ethnic minorities (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-46473269?fbclid=IwAR0XRipaNsYwPP01cIplSPvbDaJMYXQvZESwBiIZos6iKyQEdGhP7d9LCPs).

Nevertheless, the idea of meritocracy as offering opportunities for social mobility to all persisted despite Michael Young having drawn attention to its obvious flaws in his satirical dystopian (1958) book *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. Upward social mobility between generations happens, Young argued, because of large-scale economic and social change (e.g. the rapid growth of white-collar occupations in the post-war period), or because already comfortable families have the resources to protect and extend privilege for their own children. The fact that the book was satirical has been largely ignored in subsequent understandings of the concept of meritocracy so that, as Lawler (2018) remarks, it is still presented as a panacea for so many of the ills that beset Britain, especially those of inequality and a deficit of social justice (Payne 2012; Reay 2013). Lawler suggests that this is due on the one hand, to its 'common-sense air of fairness' and on the other, to becoming an ideological mantra that legitimises

contemporary neoliberal capitalism and justifies the introduction of competitive individualism into ever more areas of life. In educational terms, the neoliberal subject is produced through a discourse of 'excellence' which is 'measured' through 'SATS' (Standard Attainment Tests) in schools and the 'TEF' and 'REF' (Teaching and Research Excellence Frameworks) in universities, together with a plethora of other 'technologies of the self': a 'cult(ure) of confidence'; an emphasis in education on the need for academic 'challenge'; a need for 'resilience' and 'bounce-backability' from women; a pervasive rhetoric encouraging women to 'lean in' and young people and mothers to be entrepreneurial, by for example setting up their own businesses from home; and the adoption of 'character education' (Gill and Orgad 2016, 2018; Webster and O'Leary 2017; Spohrer et al. 2018; Allen and Bull 2018).

There is no real consideration of the advantages held by the middle and upper classes, who do considerable 'class work' (Weiss and Cipollone 2013) to maintain their hold on privilege and to hand it on to their children, whether through opting out of state provision in favour of private schooling, thereby reproducing inequality, especially in relation to élites (Kenway et al. 2016; Reeves et al. 2017), or the way that affluent families engage in 'opportunity hoarding' to protect their children against downward mobility (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/glass-floors-and-slow-growth/). Meanwhile, it is the least privileged and most affected by what might be called this 'meritocratic deficit' who are most intensely incited to work hard and to believe that nothing stands in their way but graft and self-belief (Chapman 2018).

Meritocratic discourse ignores other kinds of relations too. As Hey (2002) points out, women do not organise their aspirations and ambitions primarily in terms of an 'isolated self'; rather they locate these within the social relations in which they live. But "this is the 'meritocratic' way: to make the ever-lengthening ladder harder to access in the first place, and to instruct the least privileged to blame themselves rather than tackling the structures that continually fail them" (Littler 2018). It is an agenda, as Walkerdine (2003) shows so effectively, that commits individuals to painfully live out narratives of upward mobility as success and failure, hope and despair (see also the historical and gendered analysis of the concept in de Bellaigue et al. 2019). Despite a plethora of

reforms, then, we appear to be left with an education system that does not satisfactorily serve either the needs of society or the needs of individuals, regardless of class, gender or ethnicity (Tomlinson 2002, p. 2).

Theorising Class

When I arrived at university in the north-east of England in 1968 to undertake a joint degree in Sociology and Social Administration (now 'Social Policy'), we began with the 'founding fathers': Durkheim on the maintenance of social order; Marx on labour's relations to capital; Weber on the Protestant Ethic, cultural processes and 'interpretation'. As for contemporary *applications* of theoretical approaches, class membership, we learned, was allocated according to occupational categories, with empirical studies to show us the lives of 'the working class': Dennis et al.'s (1956) classic account of a Yorkshire coal-mining community; Hoggart's (1957) portrayal of Hunslet in Leeds; Young and Willmott's (1957) study of working-class life in London's Bethnal Green; followed in time by Goldthorpe et al.'s (1968a, b, 1969) studies of factory workers in the south, which suggested that because of their growing affluence, these members of the working class were adopting middle-class norms and aspirations. Those early studies were subsequently accused of painting an over-romanticised picture of a working-class way of life characterised by gruelling manual labour for men and domestic drudgery and financial anxiety for women, compensated for by camaraderie, solidarity, neighbourliness and a collective sense of dignity, pride and independence; while Savage (2000) suggests that even when the *Affluent Worker* studies were being conducted, the primary image of society was a relatively vague polarisation between 'us' and a distant, rich and unfathomable 'them' and the idea of collective solidarity based upon a sense of belonging, togetherness and communal identity was actually in pretty short supply.

Challenges to a purely economic analysis came from a number of sources. Feminists for example mounted an extensive critique of methods that took the household—and specifically the head of the household—as the unit of measurement in generating a classificatory system (see Lovell 2004). Since heads of household were automatically presumed to be

male, women's own class status defined in terms of their labour market participation was rendered invisible, as indeed was their unpaid domestic labour (Oakley 1975), the exception being in relation to motherhood (Steedman 1982; Walkerdine and Lucey 1989; Gillies 2007). This classificatory system also ignores other forms of power, notably those which occur along racialised lines. But how to include those rendered invisible in analyses relying solely on socio-economic positioning, especially in such altered labour markets conditions as were happening at the time? One major response was to distinguish between 'the economic' and 'the cultural', with the latter seen as critical in the analysis of gender and other forms of domination not wholly attributable to social structural factors (Lovell 2004, p. 39). The 'cultural turn' led by Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in the mid-sixties suggested the existence of *different* bases for class formation and resistance, including "a range of exciting developments for examining 'new ethnicities' …" which despite their flaws (such as apparently speaking from/to a default positionality of both maleness and Black Britishness) moved the debate on from essentialising or racialising theories of ethnicity (Ali 2003, p. 10).

Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' also attempted to go beyond purely economic analysis, with its conceptualisations of 'habitus' (norms, values and dispositions inculcated via family, education etc.); different forms of capital (cultural, social, economic resources that individuals have access to and which can be used to locate an individual's position within a social hierarchy or space and which shape their expectations of 'possibility'); and 'field' (sites where habitus and capitals interact in highly competitive negotiations over whose views count on what is of value and then become legitimised). But as Bathmaker et al. (2013) point out, the knowledge of how to 'play the game' forms part of the habitus, which means that educationally, some students "appear to have a more internalised or taken-for-granted orientation to the mobilisation of capitals" (p. 730), while in other cases choices are made that incline individuals to "cut their coats according to their cloth" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 65). In addition, the value of the stake needs to be seen by the pupils as either possible or probable in order for them to want to play the game, otherwise its practices are experienced as symbolically violent (Bowers-Brown 2015). As useful and

influential as Bourdieu remains, "we are a long way from a sustained class analysis which locates capitals as part of the stakes in systems of inequality" since under neoliberal regimes "Cultural capital becomes little more than human capital (Becker 1976) to be accrued in the person and brought to the market" (Lawler 2018, p. 107). Further, without reifying a Black-white binary, Wallace (2019) shows how cultural capital is racially classed. His study of Black middle-class pupils and their parents "draws on Blackness as a pliable political prism through which racial dominance hidden in (dominant) cultural capital is unveiled from its guise of neutrality" (p. 2). Finally, post-modernist feminisms of 'difference' place a greater emphasis on "agency, fluidity, the instability of subject positionings and identities which contrasts at times very starkly with the durability of Bourdieu's dispositional subject" (Lovell 2001, p. 42). Indeed, Bourdieu himself contradicted such 'durability', disclosing that the enduring discrepancy between his own high academic achievement and low social origin had instituted within him a 'habitus clivé'. Nevertheless, Savage et al. (2013) used a Bourdieusian 'capitals approach' to produce a new seven-fold classificatory system for the UK showing not that class has disappeared or lost its importance but that it has changed shape. Their study has certainly not been without criticism (Mills 2014) and while they noted the persistence of gender inequalities, as Sayer (2016) observes it is unclear how gender, marital status or the structure of households relate to the seven classes they produced. For this, one needs to break open the 'black box' of the family.

While parental expectations are deemed very influential for children's future occupational outcomes, there is relatively little evidence on the shaping of such expectations, or the ways in which future work and occupations are discussed between parents and children. Ball et al. (1999) show how experiential knowledge within families helps explain the inheritance, across familial generations, of ideas about valued kinds of work; while Irwin's (2018) recent exploration of values and practices amongst parents whose children were going through their teenage years between 2008 and 2014 in a context of recession, austerity, increased university fees in England and ongoing challenges in post-16 opportunities for school leavers, showed that 'Intermediate' and working-class parents demonstrated a more explicit cost–benefit calculus regarding the value of

university than for middle-class graduate parents, while vocational routes were also valued—especially by fathers who had themselves followed trades.

Bertaux and Thompson (1997) also highlight the role of family:

> The changing roles of women and men, the world-wide currents of emigration and immigration, are all witnesses to the widely dispersed human drive towards a better life. And in the development of this drive, the engine of social change and individual fulfilment—or disappointment—the primary location of generation and transmission lies within families, which provide the social and emotional launch pads for individual take-off. (p. 2)

Using life-story and drawing on a family systems approach developed in family therapy, they see the family as an interlocking structure of intergenerational and interdependent emotional relationships within which members engage in processes of 'anthroponomic production'. Case studies allow them to open the 'black box' to see what takes place inside:

> By relating families to their social and local contexts, which are bound to be highly differentiated by class and other macrostructural variables, we can begin to discern what kinds of games families are forced to play, and what are the unwritten rules of such games. (Thompson 1997, p. 30)

They highlight the importance not only of parental models, but those of grandparents, aunts and uncles; the influence of rivalries between siblings; and the power of family 'scripts' in influencing destinies down the generations, through which, for example children might find themselves trying to

> assuage the unsoothed pains of parents' own lives or … following the voices of ancestral 'ghosts'…. One family member may take on the role of the family conscience or peacemaker or historian … the family story itself may become a compelling 'script' which successive generations … appear compelled to follow. (Thompson 1997, p. 45)

Gendering Class

In 1972 as a newly qualified Probation Officer who had studied family systems theory, I started my first job, rented a flat and bought a car. I was a 'professional'. I had arrived. I had officially become middle class. The colleague I married a few years later—son of a Scottish ex-Communist spray-painter and a Yorkshire Methodist housewife—insistently held on to his male working-class roots. It wasn't until I attended a Workers' Educational Association (WEA) course because I needed to get my brain working again after the birth of our first son, that gender moved up my personal agenda through an evening class on Women's History. Nothing like the combination of marriage/motherhood and reading autobiographical texts like Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* and others in Heron's *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the Fifties* to (rather belatedly) join up the dots between the personal and the political in gender terms.

Historian Steedman (1999, 2000) highlights how a working-class self came into existence as a moral categorisation through a religious discourse of redemption, dignity and respectability, in which working-class subjects are obliged to play out their moral worth for representatives of the state/welfare system (Vincent 1981; Finch and Mason 1993). Gillies (2005, 2007) shows how negative public moral discourses are particularly applied to disadvantaged working-class *mothers*, in depictions of them as ignorant, promiscuous, uncaring, irresponsible and undeserving, thereby demonstrating the need for a policy response not in terms of redistribution of wealth but measures designed to encourage them to modify their lifestyle and conduct; and McClintock's (1995) analysis of British imperial discourse suggests that the concept of class also has a historical link to more generalisable 'others' who were known through the concept of 'degeneracy'—a term applied as much to classifying racial 'types' as to the urban poor.

Nead (1988, cited by Skeggs 2012) recounts how "Dirt and waste, sexuality and contagion, danger and disorder, degeneracy and pathology became the moral evaluations by which the working class were coded and recorded" (p. 274)—discourses which find expression in contemporary

figures like the 'chav' (Skeggs 2005). Elaborating what Kirk (2006) calls the emotional politics of class, Skeggs also adds 'affect' to the mix: "Affect and culture shape how class relations are made, known, and lived in social encounters" and yet it is "a little discussed aspect of class relationships" (2012, pp. 269–70). She identifies the way the fear, anxiety and disgust that have filled categorisations of class have been successively applied to the urban outcast, the 'contagious' woman in UK history and the 'fear of the Black planet' in the US. What is needed therefore is an analysis of an 'economy of personhood' within capitalism that can explain how different regimes of values (economic, cultural, symbolic, social, moral) can be accessed, attached and utilised, and how they work through encounters that repeatedly enhance or diminish value in the person. Incorporating affect enables us to see in even more detail how such relations "are experienced and felt as bodies move through social space and time as enhanced or cramped" (Skeggs 2014, p. 283; see also Crean 2018).

Walkerdine et al.'s (2001) examination of the intersection of the social, cultural and psychic exemplifies this. They revealed not only the educational 'failure' of working-class girls compared to their middle-class counterparts but how those working-class girls who *were* educationally 'successful' learned to negotiate complex subjectivities. Being engaged in a process of transformation which made them different from their families, working-class girls who did well paradoxically experienced the fears and anxieties that might be expected to be associated with 'failing'. For Black girls, negotiations were even more complex, involving pressure from peers to conform to a stereotypical image of 'Blackness' at school, protecting parents from any suggestion of rejection of 'whiteness' at home and studying hard in private in order to confound teachers' expectations of low achievement. Lacey (2000) observes that anxieties around cleverness that are integral to the formation of an educated working-class identity are unsurprising when cleverness may well have been constructed in childhood as a ticket out and worn through adulthood as a masquerade (p. 38). Or else such anxieties can lead to a conscious sabotaging of one's academic performance in order to prioritise peer relationships, as Orbe did for a period (2014, p. 199). This is not something that forms part of the meritocratic discourse, however, as Reay (1997) observes: "the positive connotations invested in terms such as transformation and change

mask an inherent negativity often overlooked in discussions of meritocracy" (p. 19).

What the transitions made by Walkerdine et al.'s (ibid) 'successful' working-class girls produced was a kind of fragmented subjectivity (echoing Bourdieu's 'cleft' habitus), with fissures emerging around: psychic and emotional investments, financial considerations and leaving 'home' in a very profound sense that goes beyond geographical locality (as significant as this can be), to existential notions of un/belonging and alienation. Working-class young women who went on to higher education "were routinely infantilised by family members because they were still studying and not in full-time waged labour" (p. 159). They experienced accusations of doing nothing but going out and getting drunk—short-hand for the idea that 'play' in the form of enjoying oneself had not been earned by proper 'work', which typically produced a sense of guilt that "meandered through the successful working-class young women's stories like a river with many tributaries" (pp. 160–161). Admissions of envy or jealousy by parents occurred only rarely; more common were expressions of anger and frustration by mothers at opportunities denied to them that were now being enjoyed by daughters.

Reay's (2005) educational case studies also demonstrate the feelings of ambivalence, inferiority and superiority, the visceral aversions, recognition, abjection and markings of taste that constitute a psychic economy of social class (p. 911). The rampant takeover of the curriculum in recent years by testing exacerbated these affective aspects of class, as both Black and white working-class girls internalised feelings of anticipated failure, agonising over the fact that it would confirm their status, now and in their imagined futures, as 'a nothing', powerfully illustrating Kuhn's (1995) assertion that

> You can so easily internalize the judgements of a different culture and believe – no, know – that there is something shameful and wrong about you, that you are inarticulate and stupid, have nothing to say of any value or importance, that no one will listen to you in any case, that you are undeserving, unentitled, cannot think properly, are incapable of 'getting it right'. (pp. 97–8)

While recognising these affective and symbolic 'injuries', Tyler (2015) brings us back to the links between the way people come to inhabit the names ascribed to them ('chav', 'benefit scrounger') and their access to material resources. Emancipatory struggles against class are often required to be 'strategically essentialist', she says. At the same time, "the 'risks of essence' have been the subjects of sustained debate in feminist, postcolonial and critical race theory and sociologists of class have much to learn from these debates (see Phillips 2010)" (p. 507). She cites Fraser's (1997) 'redistribution-recognition dilemma': "People who are subject to both cultural injustice and economic injustice need both recognition and redistribution. They need both to claim and to deny their specificity" (p. 16; see also Bottero and Irwin 2003). But the approach to class analysis Tyler advocates does not attempt to resolve this contradiction:

> On the contrary, the interval between class understood as an identity, and as a descriptor for struggles against the inequalities which these identities name and prescribe, is precisely the axis from which class analysis should proceed. The most effective forms of class analysis are concerned not with undertaking classification *per se*, but rather with exposing and critiquing the consequences of classificatory systems and the forms of value, judgements and norms they establish in human societies. (p. 507)

Racialising Class and Gender

The intersections of class, gender and race play out in our lives in different 'figurations' at different historical times. When I started work as a Probation Officer in 1972, my all-male case-load of those given 'community-based' sentences, plus a number of serving prisoners, came almost exclusively from working-class backgrounds (the exception being the young adult son of professional parents, whose inhibitions in relation to both shop-lifting and making advances towards women—including me—had become compromised due to a brain injury sustained in a road traffic collision). When I returned to the service in 1984 as a Magistrates' Court liaison officer, we were exercised by two concerns: the need to divert female offenders convicted of low-level offending (such as failure

to buy a TV licence) from ending up in prison for chronic inability to pay the fine they'd incurred—as a result of which we initiated unsolicited interventions in court proceedings in order to offer diversions from custody; and the over-representation of minority ethnic offenders (primarily African-Caribbean men) among those receiving higher tariff sentences, including imprisonment—as a result of which we undertook 'racism awareness training' and reviewed the pre-sentence reports we presented to the Bench on our colleagues' behalf to ensure that we weren't complicit in discriminatory practices that would contribute to the perpetuation of injustices.

Some years on, in 1992, having become an academic researcher on a project investigating the parliamentary selection processes for Westminster of the three main parties (see Norris and Lovenduski 1995), an 'old Labour' MP and future Minister who had been active in the trades union movement before entering parliament name-checked a prominent feminist party colleague of his who had a professional background in law. What I needed to understand, he explained to me, was that *he* had more in common with the working-class women in her constituency than she did. In other words, when it comes to experiential knowledge claims, class trumps gender. There was of course no recognition that the demonisation of the working classes that characterised policy discourse and its implementation (then as now) was directed at a distinctly *white* figure.

The 'whiteness' of class demonisation was only enabled, according to Skeggs (2014) through the distance that was drawn via discourses of multiculturalism between the white and the Black and South Asian working class in the UK. She sees this omission as serving a particular purpose:

> As Chris Haylett (2001) has argued, through both popular culture *and* government policy rhetoric, the Chav represents the attempt to divide and rule the working-class through ethnicity so that governmental responsibility to deal with economic inequality is eclipsed by the emphasis on individualized cultural difference. (p. 277)

She also suggests that the discourse of multiculturalism and morally loaded accusations of racism partially protected the British working-class Black and South Asian groups from the morally denigrating figurations

that white working-class girls and women experienced. For their part, however, minority ethnic groups "have been defined as dangerous and threatening, not just as a national irritant subject to disdain and contempt, but as a threat to the core of the life of the nation itself" (p. 277). At the time of my interviews with MPs, there was little recognition that the 'unmarked' white Western self as a racial being had remained largely unexamined and unnamed. It had instead been "Other, marked subjects … whose racial and cultural identities have been the focus of study" (Frankenberg 1993, p. 17). As Frankenberg points out, it is *in relation to/with* the 'Other' that the racially and culturally dominant category is co-constructed. By examining how the white women she interviewed 'think through race', she reveals the discursive and material practices through which whiteness is socially constructed. Further work has since gone into recognising whiteness as an ethnicity (Bonnett 2000; Back and Ware 2001; Byrne 2006), whereby it has broadly come to be understood as both a position of structural privilege and as an identity that embodies cultural legitimation and relative power (Gillies 2007, p. 30); and as located within a 'contingent hierarchy' of intersections with class, gender and sexuality (Garner 2006).

It was influential women writers of colour like Davis (1983), hooks (1989) and Crenshaw (1989) who argued for an understanding of the intersecting nature of gender, race and class as axes of power, inequality and subordination (see also Brah and Phoenix 2004 and Lewis 2009 on the development and applications of intersectionality). Collins (2017) identifies the 'definitional dilemmas' that later became associated with intersectionality as a term. She suggests the following principles apply: racism, sexism, class exploitation and similar systems of oppression are interconnected and mutually construct one another; configurations of social inequalities take form within intersecting oppressions; perceptions of social problems reflect how social actors are situated within the power relations of particular historical and social contexts; and because individuals and groups are differently located within intersecting oppressions, they have distinctive standpoints on social phenomena. She also draws a distinction between knowledge production projects, activist agendas and (re)productive practices, while others like Anzaldúa (1987) extended the term's remit to include 'intersectionality at the borders', focusing on the

physical US–Mexico border in Texas, as well as the symbolic borders she experienced as a part of Mexican, Indigenous and white worlds.

Scholars have addressed 'multiple intersecting differences' (Fraser 1997, p. 180) in differing ways. For example, Kerner (2017) sees intersectionality and post-colonial feminist theory as offering two distinct perspectives. What distinguishes them from each other, she suggests, is their take on time and space. The former is seen to be shaped by what she calls 'methodological localism or nationalism' (a stress on describing and theorising multiple forms of *inequality* among different subgroups of women), while the latter deliberately adopts a transnational focus to address global *power relations* and asymmetries. Furthermore, "intersectional scholarship mostly concentrates on the ways in which multiple differences intersect in the present. Postcolonial feminist theory, by contrast, endorses the decidedly historical perspective that is constitutive for the entire field of postcolonial studies" (p. 847). Mahtani (2014), on the other hand, suggests that developments in critical race theory have opened up a space to pay attention to historical amnesia, specifically in relation to mixed-race identities: a concerted focus on the present and the future, which in the process sometimes eschews the past, leads to a 'forgetting' of complex diasporic histories. It is an approach, Rollock (2012) tells us, that afforded her, as a scholar of colour, the license and power to 'speak back' about racial inequalities (p. 67).

By considering race through the idea of 'racialisation' (the process of signification invoked in relations of domination), Murji and Solomos (2005) open up analyses of the ways in which race is summoned and mobilised in racist imaginaries that position racialised groups as inferior, other or different (see also Virdee's 2019 Marxist analysis of the plurality of racisms, including the racialisation of parts of the European proletariat; Lumsden et al. 2019, for a post-Brexit example of such processes; and Skeggs' 2019 response to Virdee, which shows how capitalism was not just a colonial raced project but was also performed through the bodies of women).

Also focussing on processes, Ali's (2003) approach to 'mixed race, post-race' is to examine the gap between academic theorisation and everyday identification processes and practices. At a particular stage in life, the primary school children in her study were heavily invested in developing

gendered identities but were also aware of the importance of 'racial' identities: "learning to 'do' boy and girl and acting appropriately for those labels were the basis on which other discourses of 'race', class and ability were worked through" (p. 171). The way parents, and particularly mothers, communicated with their children about their identities was also important: "In this process, location and parental history, and parental connection to 'diaspora' or an imagined 'home' play a crucial part for the negotiation of ethnic identification" (p. 171). She uses Brah's notion of an 'analytic matrix' made up of a concept of 'diaspora', 'border' and 'the politics of location' (Brah 1996, p. 242) to interpret parents' narratives, which revealed highly individualised 'diasporic formations'. What she had not anticipated was "the role that social class played in ethnicised discourses of families". So, for example, for children of 'mixed race' from middle-class households, "class seemed to act as a kind of 'buffer' against racism" (p. 174) in the parents' eyes, although this did not mean unproblematic acceptance into 'white middle-classness', as evidenced by testimonies from mothers who were the first generation of women to become middle class in their families despite their 'racial outsider' status in the educational stakes, and who experienced limits to their belonging arising from their 'race'. Paradoxically for them, a form of disidentification with working-classness was tied to a strong identification with "cultural and ethnic positions that are often automatically positioned as working-class simply by being outside of the boundaries of the acceptable face of white middle-classness (Mirza 1992; Reynolds 2000)" (p. 176).

The Production of Un/Belonging: Space, Time and Movement

Major disruptions to lives lived in time and space can bring hitherto 'hidden' phenomena into sharper focus. (Re)creating home, as I did following the divorce I initiated in my late fifties (Goode 2007) revealed the deep entanglements of time, place, movement, emotion, relationships and the material world as resources through which we re/make ourselves (secure). While home may be an imagined place of belonging, something

we carry within us in 'the deep heart's core' (Webster 1998), cartographies of intersecting inequalities, power relations and processes of identity formation *across space and over time* have been a fruitful line of enquiry for studies of classed/gendered/racialised subjectivities. Although I am doing little more here than identifying a few of them, these approaches do offer other ways of thinking about notions of un/belonging that are central to all our stories of transition. We might divide such studies into:

- those in which the 'micro/politics of location' operate;
- those which examine the production of 'diasporic identities' through the movement and resettlement of peoples, historically and in the present; and
- those which capture the ways subjectivities and place(s) are materially and psychically co-produced and inter-generationally transmitted over time.

Massey's and McDowell's concepts of place and space can be usefully applied to the first category. Massey sees space as "a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation" (Massey 1995, p. 81); and McDowell (1996) makes an important distinction between space as relational and place as a location or a structure of feeling centred on a specific territory. Empirical examples of this approach include Reay and Lucey's (2000) examination of children living on large inner-city council estates; Paton et al.'s (2017) study of Glasgow's East End and Gray and Barford's (2018) spatial analysis of the ways austerity has exacerbated 'territorial injustice'; Hall (2018) and Loyd and Bond (2018) on the relationship between space-making and race-making; O'Brien's (2014) examination of access to cultural careers, whether in terms of social class, ethnic group or gender; Gorman's (2017) autoethnographic account of the Brooklyn/Queens border in New York where the spacialised rhythms of working-class lives lived out on the stoop were ethnically segregated from other neighbourhoods and spatially segregated by gender through his Catholic schooling; and, less common in its focus on *middle-class* place-making and place-maintenance, Benson and Jackson's (2012) study of urban and commuter-belt locations.

In relation to diasporic identities, Appadurai's (1990) conception of proliferating 'flows' of different 'scapes' has been influential, identifying how identities are constructed through mobilising specific 'imaginaries' that span the territorial boundaries of national cultures, with the mobilisation of different cultural referents being connected to different positions of power. Harden (2007) also talks of diasporic identities which are fluid, multifaceted, heterogeneous, adapting and changing in different environments and within various contexts. Diasporic identities focus attention on travels, journeys, dispersion, homes and borders in the context of questions about *who* travels, she observes. As Clifford (1994) suggests, "the concept of diaspora helps us think about identities in terms of contingency, indeterminancy and conflict; of identities in motion rather than of absolutes of nature or culture. Routes rather than roots" (p. 201). But diasporas as spatial locations also serve a need for the 'residing' community. As Brah explains (1996), "Diaspora space as a conceptual category is 'inhabited' not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as Indigenous. In other words, the concept of diaspora space … includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those 'staying put.' The diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is a native" (p. 209).

This accords with Rogaly and Taylor's (2009) concept of 'moving histories' to capture the way that patterns of migration and non-migration in individuals' lives form important aspects of self-identification; and Bhambra's (2017) argument that racial and ethnic minorities in the UK and the US comprise not only recent immigrants, but also long-standing citizens, many of whom continue to experience precarious positions. In fact, a new generation of those working within the cultural studies legacy of Stuart Hall are investigating the sociology of multiculture in its everyday context, for example Saha and Watson (2014) who offer stories of home, migration and belonging to argue for a practical cosmopolitanism that recognises that relations of power and struggles over place are often played out through emotional attachment; James (2014), who focuses on whiteness, memory and loss to examine the diasporic space of East London; Rhys-Taylor (2018), who explores concepts such as gentrification, class antagonism, new ethnicities and globalisation by collecting

Londoners' narratives that provide an account of the evolution of taste and culture through time and space; Valluvan (2016) who uses Gilroy's concept of 'conviviality' to capture the 'normalisation of ambiguity'; and Rashid (2016), who highlights diversity amongst Muslim girls in terms of region, social class and ethnicity. In Australia too, Tynan and Bishop (2019 online) examine intersections of time and place (in the form of land) with race (in the form of Indigenous heritage) and gender, to highlight how expertise becomes disembodied when "decoupled from the knower's standpoint, ontology, and raced and gendered corporeal form, particularly the feet that connect to Land and Mother beneath".

Chamberlain (1997) focuses on the importance of time within studies of place. She shows how imaginative and cultural structures within migrants' retrospectively recounted life stories, rooted in the memories of the past, shape experiences of the present. In contrast to her male participants, whose sense of self was articulated through an ability to make autonomous decisions (they talked of arriving as autonomous agents and, like heroes, succeeding against the odds as they discovered them), what women stressed in the style and content of their accounts was the enormity of the move and an implicit acknowledgement that migration contained the potential for permanent absence. In a context of 'child-shifting' (Chamberlain 2003), women stressed the emotional wrench of leaving children and the compulsion to be reunited with them even when reunion was not always possible. Nevertheless, for her female interviewees, family was one way in which women could achieve personal autonomy in a society which homogenised and marginalised Black migrants and where, through their families, a cultural autonomy could be sustained. For them, reinstating family reasserted one expression of autonomy (however much their role within the family denied them that). They also projected an image of self in terms of external appearances: "Time and again women refer to the clothes they wore, for dressing well places them in the centre, as subjects, as creators of an illusion … Could it be that men *expressed* their autonomy through migration; women *achieved* theirs through migration?" (p. 104). Women's life stories were recounted not through individual progression but through the cycle of the family. In place of heroic frameworks of return and glory, curiosity and cleverness was "a membrane through which emotions and heartbreak, dreams and reality

flowed in and out" (p. 106). Still under-researched is the impact on the children of practices such as child-shifting (Bakker et al. 2009), in particular, accounts from the children themselves (Arnold 2006).

Finally, in relation to temporal as well as spatial considerations, Walkerdine (2015) looks at the significance of the past in the development of what she calls 'affective histories'—that is, the way embodied responses to classed inequalities which are historically (and geographically) located can be transmitted over generations. Instead of seeing community in an ahistorical sense, she advocates examining the ways in which patterns of sociality formed and contained in rural and pre-industrial working-class communities can be used as a means of 'affective containment' and ontological safety in later eras, as communities adapt to new threats to their survival. Drawing on psychoanalytic frameworks, she considers the intergenerational transmission of class and gender as "an interlinked set of hauntings in which discourses, practices, policies, and events are experienced and felt in the bodies of both those who experienced them as well as those who followed them" (p. 172). There was evidence in the neglected post-industrial town she studied of older men (and women invested in the male breadwinner model of family) making life difficult for younger men who transgressed historical gender norms. It would be easy to understand this as stigmatisation or bullying, she observes. "But to think about it as affective history shows us the depth of the threat to the possibility of life and going-on-being that these changes represent" (2016, p. 706). In her studies of how affective histories impact on intersections of class, gender, community and un/belonging, then, Walkerdine brings both spatial and temporal components to bear.

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3

On Autoethnography

Jackie Goode

The Experiencing Self

Maria Popova (2018) refers to memory as a 'capricious seamstress' who threads together the stories we tell ourselves about who we are in an attempt to impose an artificial cohesion. In fact, she suggests, there is very little that makes one's childhood self and one's present day self the same person. It is in the space between 'the experiencing self' and the 'remembering self' that we make ourselves up. This feat of storytelling is a kind of craftsmanship. So how should we treat the kind of materials the craftsman storyteller uses? Or craftswomen, in our case.

Stories: In the late 1990s, I was researching the intra-household distribution of money in low-income families with young children (Goode et al. 1998). It involved interviewing partners separately and consecutively. Who was the recipient of various forms of household income? How did couples' financial arrangements (who had access to/spent what and on what) come about? Who had their 'own' money, and what it did it mean to have money of one's own when disposable income was limited

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or non-existent? One of the many challenges presented by this project (beyond the logistics of organising/conducting the interviews) was exploring/making sense of the differences between partners' accounts. Not only did Bernard's (1972) pioneering work on 'his' marriage and 'her' marriage come alive in front of me, but so did the dynamic, social and 'interactional' nature of knowledge production—as when for example one young husband began by outlining his commitment to an egalitarian model of partner relationships before 'hearing himself' describe financial practices that diverged from this. He paused, embarrassed: "Ah…" And he laughed ruefully.

Would that a male engineering professor I interviewed on the next project, about gender relations in higher education, had had a similar 'epiphany'. Instead, he failed to see any anomalies in his seizing control of the interview at its start to demonstrate his feminist credentials with an extended description of having just dropped his young children off at nursery, before, as the interview progressed, expressing his frustration with some of the "whingeing menopausal women" for whom he had managerial responsibility (Goode and Bagilhole 1998). These are stories that many a critic of 'realist' research would seize upon. And of course they raise all sorts of questions about the status of the 'data' produced by qualitative research—including the claims made by autoethnographers on the basis of *personal experience*.

Campbell and Harbord (2002) review attempts made by ethnography to respond to criticisms of the alleged reification of personal experience. The answer to the question on whose behalf the theorist speaks, according to ethnographers, they say, was a new 'modest language of interpretation' based on first-person accounts and observational data of routinised practises, but this only exacerbated "the troubled relationship between subjects and objects of knowledge rather than resolving the tension of theory and experience", since "the location of experience in the realm of the other invokes the anthropological fetishisation of difference". Hence "the turning of the analytic gaze upon the self in an act of critical reflexivity" resulting in what they call "part-autobiographical theses" (p. 6) such as Walkerdine's (1988) *Video Replay*, in which she draws on childhood memories of being pressed into the service of her mother's pleasure through being 'dressed up' for local carnivals. They argue that we are

dealing here with a fiction: "The fictions of identity, culled from popular cultural forms, are the ways in which we come to know ourselves and negotiate the various demands made upon us. Fantasy is not separable from reality and as with a palimpsest, past inscriptions surface in the present" (p. 7). Steedman similarly combines the chronological framework of history with a psychoanalytic mode of storytelling that "allows the dream, the wish, the fantasy, to be presented as evidence" (Steedman 1992, p. 49) in her exploration of the idea that fundamentally, writing history is an interpersonal process of interaction with the 'spirits' or 'ghostly presences' of historical subjects from the past (Steedman 2001, p. 71). Past inscriptions, dreams, wishes, fantasies certainly surface in Steedman's *The Tidy House* (1982), where she shows the identificatory/resistant work little girls are doing through their creative writing at school to 'story themselves' as gendered and classed subjects, by drawing on the discourses of the subjectivities/'destinies' with which they are surrounded in their families and wider neighbourhood settings. The paradox here for Campbell and Harbord is that recourse to 'fantasy' constitutes an attempt both to unseat the role of the intellectual/theorist and to claim its authority (p. 7).

Gannon highlights criticisms from the opposite direction. Although autoethnography claims to invert binaries between individual/social, body/mind, emotion/reason, and lived experience/theory in academic work, it has been criticised for *abandoning* theory. She cites Probyn, for example, who suggests that it leads to texts where "the force of the ontological is impoverished … through an insistence on the researcher's self" (1993, p. 5; Gannon 2006, p. 476). Later, Probyn appears to reconcile the alleged impoverishment, via the notion of theory itself as both an embodied and relational practice. The body is "a site for the production of knowledge, feelings, emotions and history, all of which are central to subjectivity", she says (2003, p. 290) and bodies themselves engage in theory making: "the body is always in theory and is always already deferred to…. Theory-making is a labor of the body" (Zita 1998, p. 204). Further, bodies are connected to other bodies. They exist and acquire meaning in social spaces: "the body cannot be thought of as a contained entity; it is in constant contact with others … subjectivity [is] a relational matter" (Probyn 2003, p. 290).

This idea that the 'self' is always in relation to others' (bodies) is crucial for an understanding of how 'experience' is 'socially produced' (Loveday 2016): "[I]t provides a way of placing experience at the centre of social analysis without attributing to it some kind of apodictic or essential status". From this perspective, Loveday focusses on the 'lived experience' of the participants in her research on working-class HE students not to have recourse to the 'evidence of experience' (Scott 1991), but to "think through the *social production* of experience and, in particular, how relations between actors in the field of HE are constructed by social and historical 'categories of representation' (McNay 2004, p. 179) that have unevenly attributed 'person-value' (Skeggs 2011)" (Loveday 2016, p. 1143). Skeggs (2014) argues that "an idea about personhood … came into effect through the power to consolidate the interests of specific groups". For her, the very notion of a self refers to *middle-class* subject formation—the formation of 'subjects of value'. This has particular appeal, she says provocatively, to those who are invested in being that good governmental subject or who are studying others like themselves. This conceptualisation of the self as a bourgeois product of 'possessive individualism' underpins her theorisation of the role of 'proper personhood' in legitimating only certain subjects, then—a status which is reliant for its definition on an 'improper self'.

For McNay (2004) too, experience is social—it is experience (including emotions) that allows us to see the ways in which social structures and power relations manifest:

> The essence of social being is not encompassed in experience itself but it does only begin to reveal itself through experience which must then be situated in a broader context…. By analysing emotions as a form of social interaction it is possible to see how they are both shaped by latent social structures and also the vehicle through which invisible power dynamics are made present within immediate everyday experience. (p. 187)

If certain types of social experience possess an unfinished or open-ended quality, she continues, it is because they may be historically emergent (or residual) or pertain to the experiences of socially 'muted' groups: "Although these experiences may be marginal, they are not ineffable but

are explicable through the analysis of contextual power relations" (p. 187). Collins' (1999) revisiting of her concept of the 'outsider within' illustrates this. In order to combat a recent tendency to reduce outsider-within *relationships* to questions of individual *identity*, she uses the term to describe social locations or border spaces occupied by groups with unequal power:

> Individuals claim identities as 'outsiders within' by their placement in these social locations. Thus, outsider-within identities are situational identities that are attached to specific histories of social injustice—they are not a decontextualized identity category divorced from historical social inequalities that can be assumed by anyone at will. (p. 86)

Examples of empirical research fulfilling McNay's plea "to acknowledge the often uncertain and confused present of lived experience without relinquishing the possibility of tracing its connections to social structures" (p. 187) are Charlesworth's (2000) study of a working-class community in Rotherham, where "abstract processes of deindustrialization and class dispossession manifest themselves primarily through the intensely felt emotions of boredom, inchoate anger and a sense of powerlessness" (p. 188), and Walkerdine's (2010) analysis of a Welsh ex-steel community in which, through her concept of an historically engendered and inter-generationally transmitted 'affective skin', she effectively connects the 'lived realities of identities', social structural changes arising from post-industrialisation, emotions of loss and longing and the current generation of young men's views on participation in a newly feminised labour market.

There are also echoes here of Ahmed's (2003) work on 'affective contagion'. Its focus on the way that fear works to effect boundaries between subjects and objects is perhaps a good example of making the links between lived experience and structural inequalities in that it takes us beyond notions of emotions as something individuals *have* to an analysis of what they *do*. Spohrer et al.'s (2018) study of how the discourse of 'raising aspiration' acts as a neoliberal technology of the self, individualising educational 'failure' as a lack of the right kind of ambition while itself failing to redistribute economic and educational resources, is an example of this 'performative' approach: the authors show how the discourse

perpetuates Berlant's (2011) 'cruel optimism'. By acting as a promise of social mobility through individually achieved 'betterment', the imperative to work on one's self by raising one's aspirations mobilises a fantasy that simultaneously harms working-class subjects and maintains the status quo. Such studies represent what Clarke (2006) and Hey and Leathwood (2009) regard as the best kind of work in this area, which holds on to rather than tries to eliminate tensions between the biological, the interactional, constructionist views of the social world and psychoanalytical approaches.

Others also favour preserving tensions, like Davies and Gannon (2006):

> The self both is *and* is not a fiction; is unified and transcendent *and* fragmented and always in process of being constituted, can be spoken of in realist ways *and* cannot; its voice can be claimed as authentic *and* there is no guarantee of authenticity. (p. 95)

The experience of those of mixed heritage in particular, like Derrida and Cixous who share an Algerian heritage, also supports the notion of a self as always and inevitably fractured and contingent. Destined as Cixous was continually to engage in a process of identity negotiation due to a 'genealogy' of geographical and cultural displacement, she writes:

> I and the world are never separate. The one is the double or the metaphor of the other. I doubtless owe this I of two scenes to my genealogy. I was born at/from the intersection of migrations and memories from the Occident and Orient, from the North and South. I was born a foreigner in "France" in a said-to-be "French" Algeria. I was born in a not-France calling itself "France." To tell the truth we have to trap the appearances with quotation marks. We are not what we are said to be. (Cixous 1994, p. xv)

If we are not what we are said to be, what are we? If the humanist notion of the self suggests that subjects can speak (for) themselves, poststructural theories disrupt this presumption and stress the (im)possibilities of writing the self from a fractured and fragmented subject position. This subject position can only produce knowledge that offers "partial, plural, incomplete, and contingent understandings" rather than

"analytical distance or detachment" (Denzin 2003, p. 8; Gannon 2006, p. 475). Post-structuralism "upsets humanism's basic tenets: subjects who are coherent and stable, language that is transparent, knowledge as truth produced through reason (St. Pierre 2000)" (Gannon 2006, p. 491). Gannon cites Britzman: when the ontological foundation for truth is a self who was "there", then personal experience (or what might be called "thereness") becomes what Britzman calls "the great original" (2000, p. 28). In a post-structural approach to writing the self, experience is "a category that bracket[s] and even perform[s] certain repetitions, certain problems, certain desires", and the writer writing the self questions how "experience [is] structured, how what [is] constituted as experience [is] reminiscent of … available and normative discourses" (Britzman 2000, p. 33). Like Steedman, in her reference to the cultural resources (or 'available and normative discourses') we use to 'story' what is here conceived of as a fractured self, Britzman brings us back to the imperative to recognise the ways in which personal experience is a 'relational' phenomenon, inevitably shaped by the historical and structural conditions (and narrative resources) that 'produce' it.

So we might view the writing of narratives in which personal experience is central, such as autoethnographies, as producing what Price (2015) refers to as 'narrative capital'. But what happens when this form of capital is invested for political gain? Whose interest gains primacy? Phipps (2016) cites the dialectic between oppression and empowerment which plays out over claims to 'authentic' experiences in the sex industry, for example, to illustrate once more the need for experience to be grounded in an understanding of the conditions that produce it. It is only if we can name and resist the commodification of experience, with its associated polarisation and selective empathies, she suggests, that "we might begin to articulate a politics which respects varied realities whilst allowing us to disagree" (p. 314). The fact that experiences are asymmetrically situated, she concludes, means that those who deploy 'narrative capital' from privileged positions may sometimes need to ask whose personal becomes *more* political and why—and then perhaps to cede the floor to *other* 'others'.

Re/Membering the Self

> In the Province of Quebec, the French reflexive verb appears on the license plates of motor vehicles: *je me souviens* which loosely translates to "I remember myself" or poetically/politically "I remember who I am". (Maguire 2006 online)

In the process of becoming, we are constantly engaged in bringing new information into relation with currently held schema—re/membering the old and the new. Old: when I was training to be a Probation Officer at the beginning of the 1970s, there was a rallying cry that "feelings are facts!" We were urged to pay attention to how clients made us feel (angry, sad, maternal, guilty, powerless, afraid etc.), and to analyse these feelings as well as the more externally observable 'data' produced within an encounter, for what they told us about both the client and ourselves as practitioners. Two decades later, the autoethnographer Richardson wrote: "Like other cultural groups, academics fail to recognise their practices as cultural/political choices, much less see how they are personally affected by those practices…. Although there are textually marginal places, such as appendices and prefaces, for social scientists to ponder their lived experience, making that experience the centerpiece of an article seems Improper, bordering on the Gauche and Burdensome" (1997, p. 126). And in 1997, St Pierre was urging us to consider 'transgressive' forms of data such as "emotional data, dream data, sensual data, and response data – that are out-of-category and not usually accounted for in qualitative research methodology" (p. 175). In the United Kingdom meanwhile, Coffey was remarking on the fact that the researcher-self was only referred to in methods texts in 'tangential and semi-detached ways' (1999, p. 1).

New: We might not have been 'writing ourselves in' to official research texts at that time, but it seems to me that autoethnographic practices and texts claiming to be ever more 'transgressive' sometimes fail to pay their dues to the academic work that has gone before, by kicking over the disciplinary traces in their impulse to break new ground. Scambler (2015 online) refers to a 'compression of the past'. As a result of the "absurd, anti-intellectual, institutionalized pressure" academics are under to *accelerate* productivity and output, epitomised in the United Kingdom by the

Research Excellence Framework, "the sociology of our consociates has *for no good reason* not only trumped but led to the 'de-fashioning' and near-erasure of that of our predecessors". Who reads Meads (a 'loser' who published nothing in his lifetime) now, he asks, let alone Du Bois?[1] And who taps into that rich vein of early feminist sociology suppressed at the time but now painstakingly recovered for us:

> There is an important body of literature published (or indeed unpublished) by our predecessors that is slipping by us as we construct our academic careers…. We are being constrained to neglect our predecessors. The past has been compressed and is now a mere prelude to the present.

He urges us to take full advantage of what we have learned from generation to generation and cohort to cohort, by engaging in 'meta-reflection'.

Old: in the 1970s, Bell and Newby (1977) were drawing attention to the relevance of the researcher's own experiences and biography for what is encountered in 'the field'; Hochschild (1979) was writing about emotions, their management and commercial appropriation when I was doing fieldwork for the first time as a research student; Oakley's idea first expressed in the early 1980s (and problematic in so many ways), that interviews between women "incorporate elements of a 'transition to friendship' based on shared gender subordination" (see Oakley 2016, p. 196) formed the subject of a lively discussion in the interview for my first research post in the social sciences at the beginning of the nineties; and Scott and Morgan (1993) were bringing together various examples of a thoroughly *embodied* sociology when I was doing work on the sociology of food and diet.

New: I came to autoethnography in 2005 at the first Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. Then and in following years' attendances, I was puzzled by the apparent 'forgetting' of all the related issues around self,

[1] In fact, a recent article in the 50th Anniversary volume of *Sociology* by Roseneil and Ketokivi (2016) effectively rehabilitates Mead; and Aldon D. Morris published *The Scholar Denied: WEB Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* in 2015. Du Bois also features in recent writings by Les Back, Ali Meghji and Nasar Meer and is at the centre of Paul Gilroy's 2019 Holberg Lecture, https://www.newframe.com/long-read-refusing-race-and-salvaging-the-human/?fbclid=IwAR0ZZyuZV9HswmTBVxGtoT_RG1g4pEtSpY2f05mqhGZOIEAA24NzlXjeB_U. Nevertheless, the point remains valid.

representation and 'auto practices' prefigured in the work of psychologists like Walkerdine (1985), historians like Steedman (1986, 2000), sociologists like Stanley (1993) and anthropologists like Dawson et al. (1997). My intention in 'remembering' these bodies of work is not to argue for the inclusion of an account of the evolution of autoethnography every time anyone writes (about) it. Anderson (2013) has already provided a useful summary of its lineage as well as a discussion of the importance of retaining sight of the proper goal of all research, including autoethnography, of making the links between personal experience (however evocatively represented) and the social and cultural worlds and power relations that shape and re/produce 'lived experience' (however contingent or provisional the 'knowledge' arising might be). Rather, it is an attempt to pay my own dues to the hard disciplinary work that laid the foundations for much more inclusionary (and inter-disciplinary) research/writing practices that represent departures from positivist social science, including autoethnography as a research method; to recognise that a critical approach to the auto-practices that Stanley referred to is still crucial; and connected to this, to make a plea in an academy that demands constant innovation while ruthlessly discarding what it defines as 'waste' (including our own minds and bodies, Goode 2006), for an appraisal of what is driving the 'inflationary logic' (Ahmed 2008, p. 31) at work in an apparent rush to the 'new' in academic writing, theorising and publishing.[2] Of course I am aware, as someone who has reached semi-retirement and the hindsight this stage in life affords, of the time I am now fortunate enough to have to engage in such 'meta-reflection'. Nevertheless, some 'old' scholarship remains highly relevant and some 'old' stories need constant retelling if they are not to be erased or co-opted.

And so, on to re/membering the self…

After telling a story of his schooldays, Bruner (1994) observes that "my account is couched in terms that I could not possibly have known at the time of the encounter, so as doubtless to obscure the preconceptual innocence of the 12-year-old protagonist" (p. 44). The point he is making is

[2] Ruiz-Junco and Vidal-Cortiz (2011) make a similar plea in relation to feminist women of colour: "It is important to make the politics of invizibilizing feminists of colour from this origin/genealogy of autoethnography known" (p. 208).

that the 'I' who speaks/writes cannot be assumed to be the one and the same as the 'I' who is spoken of. It is an example of what Benjamin (1992) describes as the "dynamic of self-presencing that is always and of necessity incomplete" (p. 146). King (2000) cites Steedman's autobiographical *Landscape for a Good Woman* as another example. It is "Memory as anamnesis, as a continuous process of re-remembering". Such narratives "reconstruct the events of a life in the light of 'what wasn't known then', highlighting the events which are now, with hindsight, seen to be significant" (pp. 21–22). So we are *organizing* past experience and doing so along well-structured lines. In other words, we are 'storying ourselves' in recognisable ways. Bruner (1994) again: "the story form affects the organization of experience just as surely as it affects recall – or as Henry James once put it, 'adventures happen to people who know how to tell it that way'" (p. 48). Collins and Gallinat (2010) also refer to the organisational function of memory. They suggest that (auto)ethnographic texts tend to be less concerned with 'semantic memory' (the recall of 'facts') than with 'autonoetic memory' (the ability to organise episodic examples of personal experiences into retrievable units upon which the self draws).

Later, King (2008) challenges a 'retrieval' metaphor, citing the distinction made by the Russian formalists between *fabula* (the chronological order of the 'original' events) and *sjuzet* (the order of events as presented in a narrative), in order to make the point that "the shape of a life can only be a matter of interpretation, constructed in the very act of narrating or representing – part of the construction of the *sjuzet* out of the *fabula*" (p. 341). As she observes, through describing Cavarero's (2000[1997]) use of a short story by Karen Blixen, the final 'shape' of a life is only possible from the position of hindsight. (Or, as the comedian Milton Jones, drawing on this notion, quipped, "I wrote a book called 'Everything I did in my entire life' and … I don't want to spoil the ending but … in the end … I wrote a book". BBC2 *Mock the Week*, 2018, 26 June.) Here then, memory is a reconstruction and an interpretation; and writing our memories is not a straightforward retrieval/representational act but a creative one. As Sayer (2004) explains: memories are "forever being put together (again), re-membered…" (p. 76) in what Albert (1977) calls a 'temporal comparison process' that involves a back-and-forth movement through time, as we compare our past and present selves, and through which we

construct a culturally appropriate sense of a coherent self. And once again, it is a social/relational process. This 'unending work of selfhood' (May 2017) entails aligning our memories with the memories of others who matter to us and organising and locating oneself in relation to one's cultural environment. Keighley and Pickering (2012) refer to this as 'the mnemonic imagination' which is often brought into play in relation to others' lives as well as one's own, when constructing a life story:

> …second-hand experience can be negotiated by mnemonically imagining and confronting the past that haunts the present, creatively arriving at new understandings, stimulating alternative ways of representing or communicating the past in the present, facilitating cross-temporal reinterpretations or generating critique or action based upon it … the synthesising function of the mnemonic imagination allows disparate elements of both first- and second-hand experience to be reconciled into new semantic wholes, with other people's pasts being brought into view of our own experienced past and new meanings generated through their interaction. This is perhaps … what Rosenzweig and Tahlen (1998) have called the mnemonic 'quest for identity' in which we look to the pasts of others, particularly family members … to explain how we have come to be who we are. (p. 91)

Autoethnography as Poiesis

If experience and memory are our materials, *how* do autoethnographers fashion a 'self' with them? When Richardson (1994) refers to writing *as* inquiry, she is identifying the *process* of seeking—and hopefully coming—to 'know' something that we hadn't fully apprehended at the outset. What does the process involve? What does it look like, feel like, result in? Ahmed (2016, online) writes:

> We often have a sense of things before we can make sense of things. And then perhaps you begin to put things together, different pieces, broken pieces, which reveal a social pattern. There can be joy in this process: those clicking moments, when something that had previously seemed obscure, or bizarre, begins to make sense.

For her, feminist practice is how she makes sense of things:

> We acquire words afterwards, words that would have made sense of what we experience…. And in acquiring those words, we *magnify* the experiences that are difficult; we turn towards the very things that leave us fragile. No wonder feminist work is often about timing: sometimes we are too fragile to do this work; it can be too risky to risk being shattered when we are not ready to put ourselves back together again.

Also referring to fragility and risk, Holman Jones and Harris (2019) ask "What does it mean to be unintelligible?" (p. 91). They are touching one of our most fundamental and universal needs—to be understood, not only to know but to be *known* and accepted for who we are. Family, they continue, is the primary site of belonging and solidarity. But also one of the first places we learn to enact and shield ourselves against "the normalizing violence of queer and trans phobia, racism, misogyny and class warfare". In the face of these warring practices (enactment of self/shielding from other/ing), we carry within us an enduring desire to belong: "to be held, to be protected and nurtured, to have our loves cherished and our losses mourned" (p. 97). And through that, I'd suggest, to have those fractured, split off parts of ourselves put back together, integrated—to become psychically not singular but whole.

Writing in ways that achieve this is what Dawson (1994) calls 'composure', by which a narrator produces a story of themselves with which they can live in relative psychic comfort. Like all desires, this impulse makes us both vulnerable and quest(ion)ing. Some of us pursue the quest through writing, not as a form of therapy (although such writing might have therapeutic outcomes), but as a way to make *sense* and to make *connections*—between ourselves and others who are un/like us and between the self and wider sets of social relations, cultural practices and political modes of power. Others do so in and through art, like Bunda et al. (2019) who engage in basket-weaving, painting and stitching as a method of investigating their matrilineal ancestry and recovering a sense of belonging, or Dwyer et al. (2019), who use embroidery as a way of collaboratively exploring stories of faith and place—art-making as storying, making art as making a recovered and reconnected self.

This kind of 'doing' autoethnography is in line with the so-called return to practice (Miettinen et al. 2009) or 'practice turn' in social science (Schatzki 2001), where knowledge is no longer conceived as an object of possession nor as something that pre-exists action, nor a substance to be applied when and where needed. As Gherardi and Perrotta (2014) explain, from this point of view, the distinction between knowing and doing collapses and the term 'knowing-in-practice' puts forward the idea that knowing is a practical accomplishment situated in the historical, social and cultural context in which it unfolds.

In addition to these processes of 'doing' something (writing to inquire) and 'coming to knowing' something ('knowing-in-practice'), when we write or perform an autoethnography we are also 'making' something. In the making, we imagine, identify and select fragments from memory, fantasies and images and assemble them in a new configuration that becomes the artefact we call an autoethnographic text. Phipps (2010) describes this making-with-memory-and-words/bodies rather beautifully: "Having lived with the memories in familiar ways we defamiliarize them through the specific action of 'intensive and purposeful' conversations with our pasts" (p. 105). But to what purpose, she asks? She refers to TS Eliot's 'Four Quartets' where he conjures the image of memory as a passage leading to a door that opens into a rose garden before posing the question of what the purpose would be of stirring up the dusty remains of decayed rose leaves. But perhaps we should follow the passage through the door, Phipps muses—perhaps something might be gained by 'walking the labyrinth' of memory for anthropological reflection. 'Walking the labyrinth', she tells us, has been the practice of myth and discipline in various places in the past; in ancient Greece and medieval cathedrals and, more recently, as a tool for 'spiritual' development and discovery:

> It involves the purposeful work of 'getting lost' or experiencing the self as rightly incomplete: 'The prescience of incompleteness', the 'sense of omitting facts' is the original matrix-phantom of scientific research. Such prescience, though suppressed or explained away for a long time, has been the major force behind the struggle against the positivisitic conception of science. (Santos 1995, pp. 134–5; Phipps 2010, p. 106)

For Phipps, any 'auto' method that uses narrative involves the "collection of fragments from the past, the assembling of details in ways that enable a certain telling of a certain story" in which an interplay is set up between exterior descriptions and the interior life. Following Eliot again, she posits our memories as 'echoes' from/of the past which, on hearing, are already modified, amplified and taking a different form (p. 107). Further, as Amrit (2010) explains, moving from the particulars of individual life experiences to more general insights inevitably involves distillation and selection—and the simplification and distortions involved in this process of abstraction apply to all those involved in remembering:

> There is no model, whether anthropic, rhizomic or experience-near that can resolve the inevitable simplification of abstraction. But that process of abstraction is key to the process of discovery. It is what makes a surprising or unexpected occurrence a finding rather than an oddity easily forgotten among the detritus of our memories or field notes.[3] (p. 211)

So in constructing a narrative we are engaged in *production*, and more specifically, cultural production. Van den Broucke (2019) applies this to the production of a textual and visual artefact, while Stanley et al. (2013), working with archival autobiographical materials, refer to 'bringing-into-being' or 'cultural assemblage':

> Cultural sociology has greatest import not as the development of a particular area called culture but as a means of focusing reflexive analytical attention on 'the making of the cultural' (Inglis et al. 2007; Bennett 2007; Mukerji 2007; see also Hall et al. 2010). Cultural practices involve their own often implicit knowledge-claims, with cultural production encompassing what Mukerji (2007, p. 50) calls the 'time-making activities' through which cultural forms eventuate … Bennett's (2007, p. 33) ideas about 'the work of making it', the material practices that eventuate cultural production, and 'the work it does', organized by cultural knowledges and competencies, usefully emphasize that both are constituents of cultural assemblage (p. 289).

[3] Autoethnographers' 'field-notes' might include diaries or any other personal historical/archival documents/ephemera.

They also make a plea for 'showing your workings':

> Detailed reflexive discussion of how knowledge is produced makes material the activities which constitute the mode of bringing-into-being of both cultural sociology and the cultural assemblages of its concern. And for us, the analytical reflexivity that Inglis et al. call for should not be confined to cultural sociology, having similar resonance for other inter/disciplines engaged in cultural production and analysis. (p. 289)

I aimed to do this in an earlier autoethnographic text about my father (Goode 2018) in which I refer to this making of a work as 'poiesis'. Brown and Milat (2017) observe that for the poet Sir Phillip Sidney, making can only be regarded as poiesis insofar as it exceeds the mimetic representation of action or of nature by inventing new forms that exceed existing boundaries. Heidegger referred to poiesis as a kind of 'bringing forth', a revealing or an 'unconcealment', thus aligning philosophical truth with the evocative capacity of the poetic voice. As Brown and Milat explain, Heidegger saw poetry as a kind of building, "insofar as it opens a relation between language and thinking that lets us 'dwell'" (2017, p. 7). Further, they highlight the materialist aspects of such making—poiesis as a form of fabrication which places the process of production on a continuum with such fields as architecture, engineering, materials science etc. Situated within this expanded field of material production, they suggest, poiesis traverses any particular art form, "drawing the methods and materials of discrepant productive practices into relation, articulating their common conceptual, formal, and ideological problems across boundaries between specific media, institutional contexts, and disciplinary protocols" (p. 8). *What* was being made/dynamically brought-into-being (the 'product') as I engaged in poiesis—intersubjectively interacting with the 'materials' of time, place, memory, affect, imagination, words, laptop, editors, reviewers etc.—was not only a single text (an artefact called an autoethnographic journal article), or even several texts (the poems assembled within the prose of that text), but a self—a 'made up' self. It is not a random process, however; autoethnographic practice as poiesis is a genre of artistic endeavour, a skilled form of craft work—so that there are aesthetic as well as 'communicative' values to take into consideration.

If we consider the *materials*, the *processes* and the *products* of our 'making' as jointly comprising 'doing autoethnography' then, how might we assess the claims we are making for it as a mode of research (that goes beyond 'inquiry')? I would suggest that the extent to which the links between the individual body and the 'social body' have been made remains central. I have discussed the way that the material of 'personal experience' should be grounded in an understanding of the conditions that produce it; and the way that our 'memory practices' arise from the social worlds in which we are embedded and the cultural resources upon which we draw. Now I suggest that autoethnography as poiesis is also a social genre, dependent on its art and craft for its *communicative* capacity. It is a dialogic process. Inherent in the making is the telling. Re/membered accounts are "complex productions shaped by diverse narratives and genres and replete with absences, silences, condensations and displacements that [are] related in complex ways to the dialogic moment of their telling" (Radstone 2000, p. 11).

Jedlowski (2001) suggests that in relation to re/membered testimonies, the factual truth of what the individual claims is less important than its emotional truth, and that the content of what is narrated is less important than the *ways in which it is expressed* (pp. 31–32). This comes close to the novelist's perspective. Janice Galloway (2009), author of the provocatively titled 'This Is Not About Me', suggests in her interview in the *London Review of Books* that for the novelist, veracity is a matter of feeling, texture and detail and that what is being sought is not what she calls 'camera-roll' truth, nor the kind of 'truth' that a police officer giving evidence in court might supply, nor is she seeking to impose the writer's own conclusions on the reader; rather she is aiming to allow the reader an experience of direct sensation. This is not 'fictionalising' she argues, but 'methodology'—a way of enabling access to a version of what she herself saw that is as truthful as she can make it 'through the skin'. These then are how these authors suggest we assess the claims being made by such a text: 'veracity' is rendered through feeling, texture, detail; it is a 'version' of reality that is being offered; it is not a life that is seen (and re/membered) *neutrally* but one that is as 'truthful' as it can be made to be. Further, in making a work, the writer/maker aims to leave a space for the reader to enter in and interact with the text. "What readers extrapolate from my

books" Galloway continues, "is something over which I have no control whatsoever. I only hope readers do something with it that is meaningful to them". As Cosslett et al. (2000) contend "the right to establish validity, authenticity or truth is never the story-teller's alone" (p. 5).

Of course, autoethnographers are not (usually) claiming to be novelists. We may learn to use some of the novelist's (or other kinds of artists') tools. At our best, we may acquire some of their artistic strengths and crafting skills. We may construct an elegant, beautiful, illuminating, analytical, evocative text. But as la Fuente (2019) counsels, when engaging in 'textual sociology' we should also avoid falling prey to the simply 'decorative' (Rojek and Turner 2000). As I have emphasised, autoethnography is a bringing-into-being whose proper 'authorial intentions' are to communicate something beyond the concerns of the self (Maguire 2006), so we should heed Geerz's (1973) warning not to lose touch with what he calls the hard surfaces of life—the political, economic, stratificatory realities within which human beings live their everyday lives (p. 30). This is a responsibility that becomes even more salient when we use 'blurred genres' (Bretell 1997) to make our methods 'dance a little' (Thrift 2008, in Vannini 2015). It's the responsibility "to himself and his family, to language, to his audience, to truth and to his story itself" that supreme storyteller Philip Pullman (2017) identifies (p. 7). Perhaps we need to be especially conscientious when doing autoethnography as a creative form of inquiry at a time when we are living with some worrying consequences of 'pushing the bounds' between competing knowledge claims. In some contexts, after all, "the bounds are what make the real world real and the fake bullshit fake" (Harrison 2019).

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4

On Be(com)ing Clever

Liz Thomas

When did I know I was a 'clever' girl? Ah well, it's a slippery notion, that one….

September 1953

Milk-time on my first day at school. I want to go home because school must be over.

"Not yet," says Miss Bertram.

I burst into tears.

"Look," she says, pointing to a long card resting like a tent on the front of my desk. "It says 'Elizabeth Swain.'" She looks at my best friend Mary's card. "It's *longer* than 'Mary Brooks'."

I look at my card. "Elizabeth Swain." My name. It has more letters than Mary's. I must be cleverer.

Inside me, the feeling persists. A year later, it is confirmed when Mary and I are separated. She goes into the B class and I go into the A class. An early lesson. I am 6 and I know that A is better than B. My parents

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reinforce what I know. They are very proud of me for being clever. In some homes, it means that you're getting too smart, too cocky, above your station—but in mine it means being intelligent.

"Always do your best," my mother tells us as she packs us off to school.

I am Libby, youngest of three, separated by enough years from my siblings—nine years between me and Jackie and four between me and John—to sometimes make it feel like I'm an only child. They say that I am the favourite in the family, and though I protest, I think I probably am. As Jackie will tell me in years to come, when she was two, she had to watch our parents grieve over the loss of ten-month-old baby Anne, and when she was 12, she witnessed worried parents dealing with John's falling seriously ill with encephalitis. She grew argumentative and couldn't wait to leave home. John became a worry to my mum and a disappointment to my dad. He got into bad ways. The last to arrive, I am 'never any trouble'. I want Mum and Dad to feel good about me. I am not argumentative. I want to soothe their worries and assuage any disappointments.

We live in a two-up, two-down rented house, and on a winter's evening, we are together in the kitchen, Dad mending shoes, Jackie reading right up against the fire and Mum working the darning mushroom under the holes in a pile of Dad's socks. John is mending his bike, and I'm in the alcove, by the pantry door, toy cupboard doors flung open, arranging in order the complete set of 'Noddy' books that have been handed down to me from my godmother's daughter, Lida. They are mine now for me to smell the pages and read at leisure.

With five of us all together, there's the odd row now and again, especially when Jackie moves through her teenage years and picks arguments with Dad. On these occasions, John and I retreat to the 'bogey hole', the cupboard under the stairs that Mum has cleared out for us to have as our 'club'. It smells of damp and gas, but it is 'our space'—walls covered in club rules and projects we've planned but will never execute. In the torchlight, we plot and scheme for hours behind the closed door. Still at junior school, I am always the leader, the organiser. The one with more letters in my name.

Primary Schoolgirl Liz

April 1959

"No. No letter today, Libby. I'm sure something will arrive soon."

Mum smiles and clasps her hand round my shoulder.

"But, do you think he's posted it in the wrong box?"

"Well, he knows our name so I don't think he'd do that. If I see him, I'll tell him we are looking out for a letter for you."

I sit still at the top of the stairs, chin in hands, waiting for the letter box to rattle and *that* letter to land on the lino in the hallway. The letter of acceptance to the grammar school. Affirmation that I have passed my 11-plus. Although I don't know it at this time, only 10 per cent of eligible

children go to grammar school this year. The rest go to secondary modern or technical school.[1] Neither do I know that before this, more girls than boys are getting a pass, so that in order to ensure an equal number of girls and boys get in, they make the pass rate higher for girls.

It's not until I get to school that I realise the letter taking me to the grammar school will never arrive. Others have had theirs. My friends are chattering excitedly and I think there has to be some huge mistake. My last school report read, "Elizabeth needs to be more careful with her spelling and attention to punctuation, but on the whole is working well in her last year before secondary". Surely that meant that I am as clever as my best friend Heather Scarborough?! I am on the next-to-top table in school and have spent my pocket money on past exam papers for months.

All my parents say is "We know you've done your best".

They don't seem bothered that I am going to the local all-girls 'sec mod' on Nether Street that in my sister's time was known as 'Beeston maternity home' because of the girls who get pregnant there. It's like I've been punished. I trudge off to Nether Street in my bottle green uniform, face set and fists clenched, feeling rebellious and determined not to try hard. Not so clever after all.

Miss Herring, our head teacher, had been appointed about four years earlier, the first Indian woman in the county to head up a secondary school. She has turned the school around. Girls are achieving, are better behaved and courteous. She brings out the best in us all. At morning assembly, she gives us a homily, standing there on the stage in her sumptuous sari and bright red bindi.

"Do well today girls because tomorrow matters" or "Everything you do has consequences".

But in the first year my anger persists, and by its end I am bottom of the class. Now my school report reads, "A very disappointing result all round. Elizabeth has the potential to do much better. More effort and

[1] The 1944 Education Act introduced a three-tier system of secondary education (grammar, secondary modern and secondary technical schools), designed to channel people into the kinds of education best suited to their 'innate' abilities, with the highest rewards going to those who possessed a sufficient 'intelligence quotient' (IQ) to pass the '11-plus' examination at the end of the primary years and gain admission to the grammar school with its 'academic' curriculum as a potential gateway to university.

concentration required next term." I do make a new friend though. Wendy lives in a big detached house, round the corner from my grandma's back-to-back.[2] We walk home together at lunchtime on the weeks that Dad is on early shifts and grandma makes my dinner.

And then one day the following year, Mr. Evans my class teacher asks me to stay behind.

"Do you know," he says in his soft Welsh accent, "I think you're really a clever little girl, but I also think you're a bit unhappy". I burst into tears and tell him the tragedy of the 11-plus. I promise to do better. And I keep my promise by rising to the top of the class.

I rediscover the creative writing I used to love and realise I can add colour and description as well as fact to Geography and to History too. Revising for tests becomes easy now that I can see them as colourful stories and the better my marks, the more I strive. Wendy and I are always at the top now—with her coming second and me first.

March 1961

Being top of the class sometimes brings boredom though. I can stay there easily now but there's no challenge. This isn't to last. The day I successfully flick an ink pellet right into the middle of Mrs. Goodall's immaculate register marks the turning point.

"Who did that?!" she screeches. The herringbone pattern of attendance marks is now spattered with inky splodges.

"Er, I did." I am amazed. I'd never thought the inky blotting paper would go further than the girl in front.

"Go to Miss Herring at once!"

In the Head's office I confess all. I'm sure I see a faint smile.

"Well," she says, "not a good idea was it? I expect better of you." But there's more.

"While you're here though, I have some news. We are going to put you forward for the 13-plus exam. This means you have to go to Bramcote Hills Grammar for an entrance exam. What do you think?"

[2] Lines of terraced or 'row houses', built 'back to back', each with a small back yard.

I shiver with excitement.

"Oh! Yes, of course! Thank you!"

Here is my chance. Grammar school. I can be *really* clever there.

Wendy had already been sent to the technical school for a test and I'd been confused by that. Why was she going when *I* was top of the class? Now it makes sense. A chance for the grammar school!

"You'd better stay with me for the rest of the day," Miss Herring says, jolting me out of my reverie. "I'm not sure Mrs Goodall will be anxious to see you for a while."

I make her cups of tea and smile all day long. Mum and Dad are as happy as me. I'm on my way. Wendy isn't happy. She's jealous.

"Well, anyway, my dad says you're working class!" she hisses.

I hit her hard and get given 1000 lines for my pains. Or hers!

"I must always respect another's point of view."

Good for practising the possessive apostrophe but not for my temper or sense of personal affront. Wendy and I fall out forever. I wonder about what the signs are of being working class….

"Council houses are where common people live!"

This familiar playground jibe usually results in a fight between boys all trying to prove themselves top dog.

"Wearing a headscarf is common."

This is one of Mum's. She has a few of them—like eating with your mouth open or with your elbows on the table. She doesn't need to spell it out that the scruffy kids from 'the estate' are common; they always have police banging on the door and their mothers wear curlers and yawp at other mothers and their snotty-nosed kids. I can never work out where 'the estate' is in relation to our house, which like those around us is privately rented and within an attractively laid-out immediately pre-war housing development. Still, I am 13 before we have a washing machine, a phone and a television set. By now, Mum is working full-time, and Dad has a motorbike and sidecar too. He swops it for a car when I am 17. Our holidays are spent in Skegness, the east coast resort favoured by people from the East Midlands. The local factories close down during 'Wakes Week' and off we go on the train with Dad carrying the suitcase on his shoulder. Mum makes tea in the caravan on arrival—an early version of 'self-catering'. At home there are books and newspapers in the house and

the whole family goes regularly to the library; we read comics but *The Children's Newspaper* too, and when I grow out of this, I occasionally spend my pocket money on *Look and Learn* with its centre fold pull out picture.

Does all this make me working class? Do I *feel* working class? Sometimes. And that makes me feel embarrassed and a bit ashamed. But Dad talks about the working class in political terms. He reads *The Daily Mirror*,[3] and trade unionism is talked of a lot when he is appointed a shop steward. Now he spends much of his time 'talking to management'. I sense a *Them and Us* emerging. School trips are also an embarrassment. I feign a lack of interest because I know there is no spare money for such 'luxuries'. I am also ashamed of going to grandma's—that old rickety end-of-terrace house with an outside privy. In years to come, two modest houses will replace the terrace of five houses that had stood there.

'Doing your best' at school is still expected. We never have a day off except for childhood illness. We are encouraged to talk about what we've learned and 'dead end' jobs are definitely not to be aspired to.

"You see, Mary's got a job now as a shorthand typist and can afford to go to Majorca on holiday. But you wait, she'll be on the same pay packet long after you've overtaken her on your salary. Studying will pay in the end."

In terms of occupation and income we are working class, but Mum has middle-class aspirations. In this, she is helped enormously by my godmother, the formidable Elizabeth Drysdale. Elizabeth is the clinic doctor who Mum goes to see when pregnant with me. They strike up a lasting friendship and Elizabeth tells Mum,

"When it's born, I'd like to play a part in this child's life."

So I am given her name and she becomes my godmother. She has a daughter of her own, Lida, who is away at boarding school. She also has a marriage that's on the rocks. Mum becomes a comfort and a listening ear for many years. Along the way, 'Auntie Elizabeth' becomes a huge influence in my life. She encourages me to read poetry. She gives me *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam* for my 11th birthday. She indulges my love of ballet by buying ballet shoes and pictures of Margot Fonteyn. And when

[3] Popular left-leaning tabloid newspaper.

I go to the grammar school, she insists on buying my school uniform. My father objects. He is proud and angry at her interference. He never liked her much. Mum prevails. Elizabeth buys it all. Her Christmas and birthday presents to me are a cause for worry, though. My mum's sense of fairness means that she has to find money to buy my siblings an extra present to make up for mine. Nevertheless, my getting into grammar school means that Dad's eyes light up, Mum is proud and I feel encouraged and supported. One of their children has 'made it'. My cleverness and I are reunited. At 13, I don't think much about why 'making it' is so important to them.

January 1925

Horace Swain, fourth of five children to Charlie Swain, farrier, and Maria Swain (née Brown), laundress.

After a rudimentary education, my father emerged as a clever boy. At 16, he was given a chance to train at Greenwich as a ship's radio officer, but, so the story goes, his parents drank away the money for his lodgings. He went to night school instead and during the war years he sold vacuum cleaners door-to-door rather than take the 'dole'. Later, he worked as a railway signalman at Beeston South in Nottingham. In later life, failing health forced him into more sedentary work and he finished his working life in the stores at Plessey's electronics factory. A Communist by inclination, he channelled his strong sense of social justice into a lifelong dedication to Trades Unionism. 'Invisibly' educated through trade unionism, passionate and principled, this man wanted to see his youngest live out a dream he once had—for her to be educated and become a 'somebody' who was noticed.

May 1926

Sarah Margaret Slater ('Maggie'), adopted daughter of Will Slater, platelayer, and Annie Slater (née Tyson), church cleaner.

Educated at a church-run elementary school in Torver, a small settlement on Lake Coniston in the North-West of England—where she did well. But her teacher Miss Copsey was apologetic.

"Yer see Maggie, yer might be bright an' all, but Barrow grammar is only fer the lads, yer know that full well."

So at 16, my mum—the little girl who pressed wild flowers under her desk seat at school—went off to Nottingham instead, to be a chambermaid. She wanted her daughter to have opportunities. She didn't want her to suffer the anonymity that she had felt as an adopted child. She wanted her to become a somebody who is noticed.

May 1961

"We don't expect much of these children. They are, after all, an experiment."

Mr. Lyons, the headmaster of Bramcote Hills Grammar School, is 'welcoming' the parents of the ten 13-plus children being admitted from secondary moderns in Nottinghamshire. I am there with Dad. Mr. Lyons is technically correct, of course. The late transfer at age 13-plus is a new idea that some grammar schools in England and Wales are trying out. But as we walk away, Dad is gripping my hand tightly.

"Now you just show them how clever you are. Show them what a working-class girl can do!"

He is livid that his daughter is seen as an experiment. I am bemused. Frightened at his outburst and concerned that he still thinks we're working class. It's one thing to be called it in jealousy, but another to hear your own dad say it. Is that how he sees us, I wonder? *Am* I working class?

On that day in May 1961, he hands me his 'script':

"Get on and make me proud."

It's a winding path, 'getting on', and I have no idea right now where it will take me….

January 1962

The television that has come to our home is screaming out the news every day. The nuclear arms race, the Cold War and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament all insinuate themselves into my teenage mind. I wear my CND badge with pride. It's fashionable anyway. The Americans launch an attempt to bring Cuba's Fidel Castro down. They fail. Less than a year later, Castro retaliates by inviting the Russians to install nuclear warheads pointing at America. There is talk of nuclear war and people are scared. Leaflets in shops tell us how to prepare for nuclear fallout. My rebellious brother at 17 is getting into trouble with the police. It seems too much for Mum to handle. I retreat to the bedroom that is all mine since Jackie left to get married. I keep my head down, reading and studying, anything to shut out the possible future horror. Are we all going to die in some terrible explosion? Will I never get to grow up and have a family? By the end of 1963 John F. Kennedy, US president, has been assassinated. I am 15 and the world seems a very dangerous place.

Mum and Dad are vigilant and keep talking to me. At least I can discuss my worst nightmares. In comparison to all of this, my time at grammar school is uneventful. There is little encouragement to set me on a path to university as I had hoped. It's Mr. Gibson who saves me from failure in 'O'-level maths by giving me extra work and solving the mystery of algebra; and Mr. Cox who suggests I take an 'O'-level in art instead of just mooching around the art room at lunchtime with my friend Gail who is doing 'A'-level. We 'experimental' ones are taught in our small transfer group, isolated from the rest of the year groups—the rationale being that we need to catch up. My dreams of becoming a doctor are scuppered already—no physics or chemistry for us as we have already missed two years. We are just allowed to do Biology.

I sit seven 'O' levels and pass them all. The head teacher seems surprised. He seems to be unclear about what to do with me.

"Well, I *suppose* you could go into the sixth form…"

And so I do, with my friend Gail, another transferee.

Three 'A' levels required for university. Will I get them? Well no, I manage two. Perhaps the civil service or even teacher training college?

Our 'careers education' consists of a swivel-stand in the corridor laden with tired floppy prospectuses for teacher training colleges. I decide to train as a junior/secondary teacher in History and Drama at Hull. My parents are happy. I have chosen a good respectable profession. Lots of girls like me are picking teaching or secretarial work. I am excited to be leaving home, to be learning new things, getting to know a bigger group of friends.

July 1966

In grandma's kitchen, Mum tells her the good news: I have an offer from Hull College of Education.

"Oh, Margaret, what are yer doin'? It's a waste o' time educatin' a girl. Ye'd best get 'er out workin' and bringin' in some rent."

"Mariah, you're old-fashioned. Things have changed and women are getting the well-paid jobs that the men once had. Why? because they're being educated!"

My mum spits this out with all the pent-up fury of her own grammar school 'refusal'. Granddad is of a softer strain. He sits in the back of Dad's 'Hillman Imp' in the college car-park on the day of my arrival in Hull with tears in his eyes.

"Go on me' lass. You show em!"

"Thanks, granddad."

I will never see him again. When he dies, Mum says,

"Don't bother coming to the funeral. You'll be busy studying."

So I don't.

September 1966

My own room in Wilberforce Hall. Coffee, tea, sugar and biscuits supplied to each of us every term. Entertaining in your room. I can experiment, buy clothes with my grant, go to the uni bar, meet boys, play hockey—and do some studying too! I like my course and the lecturers. I'm a bit homesick but so is everyone else. We talk, get drunk, have sex.

And then comes an invitation to create a new persona, even if I don't see it like this at the time.

We are in the drama studio. Our flamboyant lecturer, Mr. Martin, is telling us about voice projection.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you simply *must* push your voice out and capture the right intonation at the same time. Let's practise now."

We 'Ooooh' and 'Aaaah' and then with a dramatic flounce he comes to stand next to me.

"Oh no, darling! Not that! If you think you're going on stage with an accent like that … well … you're mistaken! I suggest you get some elocution lessons – soooon!"

He flourishes his hand and is gone. My Nottingham accent is under threat. After the initial shock and embarrassment, I get to thinking it could be a very useful piece of advice. Under cover of being essential for acting, I can create a new voice—something that sounds middle class and … 'educated'. I dedicate myself to this cause and spend the next six months changing the length of my vowels until I get used to this new sound. This is a bit troublesome when I return home. My friends think I'm stuck up and my parents … well … they're bemused. But doing Drama is the perfect environment to practise this new way of talking and to start to feel comfortable with it. Regional accents are definitely not *de rigueur*.

An opportunity arises for me to go to the Cambridge May Ball with Tony who is at Jesus College reading Metallurgy. We'd met doing the Christmas post in Nottingham and had been corresponding for a while. Can I do an Eliza Doolittle? Yes, indeed! I very much feel the part, hanging over a bridge over the Cam, watching Prince Charles punting by, the 'Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band' playing in the background and me in my grant-busting ball gown. Such fun! I could *seriously* get used to this!

1968

More distractions are on the way. For the last two years, my results have been very good. I have worked hard and it has paid off. I jump at the opportunity, offered for the first time this year, to convert my teaching

certificate to a B.Ed. degree. But now Tim arrives on the scene, wanting a part in *Blithe Spirit* which I am producing. Falling for him means my studies slacken off just when I need all my focus.

"Hello, Mum. How are you?"

I am huddled in the phone booth at the front of Wilberforce Hall taking her call. She never usually phones so late. She'd pipped me to it. I was going to call her to say I was on the B.Ed. course.

"Oh, Libby…" she's crying.

"What? What is it, Mum?"

"It's John. His trial went badly. He's going to prison for six months. Don't tell anyone. Work hard. Try to put it behind you. We'll be all right…"

"I'll come home."

"What can you do? No—best stay where you are. Just work hard."

I am 13 years old again in my bedroom, cold and vulnerable, working hard to shut out the fear. I do as Mum says. I work hard again, only this time to escape home. After all, I am transformed. I have a different accent. I have a university degree in the offing. I have a proposal of marriage from Tim who comes from an upper middle-class family. Being clever has brought me all these things. I don't have to think about my troublesome brother. Some parts of the past have been frightening but I can control my future. There is no war threatening now. I just need to get my head down, work hard and succeed.

June 1970

"Oh, this is *such* good news. Congratulations, my love! You've got your B.Ed.—we'll buy you your cap and gown."

"No, Mum. You hire them. Everyone does that."

"Oh no, not for my girl. Only the best. We'll buy it. You've got this far. It's what Dad and I want."

Any further protestations will go unheard now. I have pleased her again. Her little girl has 'made it'. This new heavy silk is the public uniform to send me up into the middle classes.

"Wait till I tell our Sally! The first in the family to go to university!"

She drifts around the kitchen clutching my degree confirmation letter, now damp with her tears, and constantly scrutinises it as if the words might disappear. It is that last year, the one year not at college but at university, the one that has given me the degree, that is so significant for her. And not only for her. In a few years, it will be the B.Ed. that I'll emphasise on my CV, making light of the Cert. Ed. teaching qualification that had led me there. I guess I am responding to what I think society values most, too. The B.Ed. is a 'real' degree despite its newness, won through the rigours of university study. I have arrived.

September 1970

And so to my first teaching job at Ilkley Grammar School, newly turned Comprehensive. I am to teach Social Studies to the non-examination group, fresh up from the secondary modern in the valley. They are schooled in a purpose-built unit, away from the GCE streams. Plus ça change, but this time I am on the other side of the desk. They are heady days, the five years I spend here, pleasing the Head by adding sailing, photography and rock climbing to the curriculum for the self-described 'thickies' he wants to keep 'contained', while the Latin teacher struggles to conjugate verbs with ex-secondary modern kids.

The kids and I build up a mutual respect as I develop my philosophy of education. 'Educere'—to 'lead out'. Teach them *how to learn*—make education a set of invitations rather than a set of expectations. Kids with golden hearts who really want to get out of school to help their dads on the farm or tinker with a motorbike in the local garage, become outgoing and curious about things. They are plucky and genuine and I like them a lot. But when it comes to marrying Tim two years into teaching. I am already quietly asking myself if this is what I *really* want to do. Marriage into an upper-middle-class family, to a man whose ideas and values aren't mine? Have I not relaxed into a more authentic self? On my wedding day I know I am kidding myself, making a big mistake, but I walk up the aisle anyway. I am too frightened to back out, let everyone down. Let Mum and Dad down. And anyway, I am afraid of being 'left on the shelf'. At the ceremony, even my about-to-be mother-in-law is

trying to mitigate the (mis)match. She leans over to my godmother and whispers,

"Well, Tim is no catch really."

Elizabeth screws up her gloves and adjusts her hat. The wedding reception at the Conservative club is cramped and awkward, especially for my staunchly left-wing father.

I play the game well around my husband's family. I have the 'right' accent, the intelligence and the social etiquette. Thanks to my 'Little Hostess' badge from the Girl Guides, I can set a table with confidence. I can hack the mystery of glass table-ware usage! But there are the occasional veiled comments.

"You probably don't know how to clean a pheasant", and "We can lend you some skiing gear".

Needless to say, the marriage is a disaster. Tim has an affair and we separate. I am 28 and leave to work in a new school in Bradford. I fill those moments when humiliation descends with the creation of a new school library. But the walls of my high-rise flat close in on me. I feel fragmented. Lost. Not so clever after all.

September 1976

A chance to climb out of my 'Slough of Despond' comes quite unexpectedly. A girl friend asks if I'll go with her across the Sahara Desert to deliver a Landrover to the charity 'Save the Children' in Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso). A year later, we are off on our 1000-mile journey across the Sahara from In Saleh to Niamey, having driven through Europe, Morocco and Algeria to get to the start of the desert. I am on another journey, too, away from the outward trappings of self (in the beginning, my diary entries are full of a woman obsessed with self-image) towards an inner understanding. Details of overindulgence ("My old problem of bingeing on food has loomed up and I've let it have its head") give way to admonishments ("Why am I so obsessed with eating? Feed the mind and not the body!"). As we travel this 1000 miles across an unforgiving landscape stripped back to its sandy beginnings, I am beginning to document a wiser inner voice ("Don't break down, don't lose your

way, stay nourished and protected. Be grateful for the companionship of desert dwellers").

I return to teaching, but not in the United Kingdom. I spend four years in Kenya. I become fascinated by children who arrive from Iceland with parents who are teaching the local fishermen the latest fishing techniques. English is the language of politics, commerce and education in Kenya and within months, these children who arrived with no English are not only speaking it with some fluency but learning their school subjects in English too. My curiosity about this process leads me back to England to Essex University. I immerse myself in learning once more, solving the mysteries of how children achieve such competence in language learning. I'm not doing it to meet others' expectations or fulfil others' aspirations. I'm not playing a part this time—no longer an actor on a stage, not following another's script, however well intentioned—now I'm the writer of the play. My 'cleverness' is be/coming of age. I feel a gentle exhilaration at finding answers to my own enquiries and falling in love with learning for its own sake. Still, as a bonus and a gift to my dad, in 1982, I also get my MA in Applied Linguistics.

So what did the 'Clever Girl' do next?

2019

I didn't return to Kenya or indeed to teaching in schools. I spent the best part of the next 33 years in tertiary education—as a phonetician working with Libyan students before WPC Yvonne Fletcher of the Metropolitan Police was fatally wounded by an unknown gunman firing from the Libyan embassy on St James's Square in London and Prime Minister Thatcher sent all those living in the United Kingdom back to Libya; in senior management posts in Further Education; and, after a period of full-time parenthood, as a Teacher Educator.

And what of cleverness? As a youngster, demonstrating that I had the requisite 'intelligence quotient' was a measure of my cleverness. Avoiding being another disappointment to my parents was important. The need to do both of these got me to the grammar school. Geo-political events like the Cuban Missile Crisis strengthened the drive, as a bulwark against

horror. All of these got me to university. In those days, this was the hallmark of success. If you were from a background like mine, it also enabled you to 'get on', to be lifted out of your social class. For my parents, who had had to forfeit their own opportunities for 'advancement', this was seen as an unalloyed good. For me, achieving middle-class status is a more complex and ambiguous affair than my dad's distinction between 'Us' and 'Them'—hardly surprising given the huge changes in labour market conditions and industrial relations that have taken place since he was a shop steward. Hardly surprising too, given the 'goods' conferred on me by my middle-class godmother; the 'transformation' my drama teacher encouraged me to make; the momentary glimpse of another life at Oxbridge I had; the condescension visited on me by my short-lived in-laws; and the insight into other lives in the global south that my travels and work abroad afforded me.

After a professional life in teaching, I still think academic prowess is a mark of cleverness—but there's so much more to it than that. Like a growth in confidence and self-esteem, an emerging recognition of one's ability and of the power we have to change the way things are. These are the 'invitations' I've had the privilege, passion and conviction to offer students when 'leading them into' a place where opportunities they may not have seen as achievable for them open up. I think I 'knew' all along that I was clever, despite early setbacks (and despite the diversions, for girls/young women, arising from a fear of being 'left on the shelf'). As we all do, I had to learn it 'experientially' too—to learn that being clever isn't about accent or the status such things are seen to confer. Nor is it about whatever the contemporary 'signifiers' are … Wealth? Social media presence? I hope today's teachers, like those who saw my true potential at crucial moments in my life, get the support they need to validate and 'bring on' the next generation of 'clever girls' out there.

5

Too Clever by Half

Jackie Goode

We have to go back a bit first. To my mother's story. It's not unique, far from it. It's one featured by other (academic and non-academic) writers like Walkerdine (2014), Steedman (1986) and Forster (1996). And it's one I've referred to before (Goode 2018a). But it does provide a kind of key. It centres on a 'family secret'. As Kuhn comments, "a family without secrets is rare indeed". Few of hers, she observes, are likely to be particularly out of the ordinary: "But if my family secrets are neither unique nor special, that is precisely the point". Her point is that the 'memory work' in which she engages in the production of herself "makes it possible to explore connections between 'public' historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity and gender, and 'personal' memory" (1995, p. 4). The secret at the heart of my story is illegitimacy. As I said—incredibly common. Except the secret got out, as secrets tend to do, with lasting effects on my mother. And arguably, through her, on me. It was her older brother who was born 'out of wedlock' (how archaic that sounds now!) But it is a testament to the power of

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shame that its mark reverberates through the generations. So my mother was driven to prove wrong the teacher who told her in front of her whole class, when news of her brother's ignominious birth got out and spread through the village, that she would "never amount to anything" coming as she did from "stock like that". A stain. A Mark of Cain. Which she strove all her life to erase and replace with a Badge of Respectability (Skeggs 1997; Hanley 2016). And that, it seems to me, in retrospect, led to an approach to life characterised by over-compensating for her 'spoiled identity' (Goffman 1963) by getting the first strike in.

Hey (2006) cites Childers' (2002) reference to the 'pit bull voice'. A voice developed in opposition, as resistance to the look, the words, the tone of voice used by one class with the power to pass judgement publicly on another, to signify their respective places in the 'proper' order of things and to keep the subjugated subject in theirs (see Scott and Scott's 2000, description of their mother's determination to be "no bugger's skivvy"). Class-related shame can be experienced just as powerfully 'second-hand'—as in Steedman's childhood when she witnessed her mother being patronised by a health visitor. It resulted in Carolyn developing a determined defiance, an inner 'pit bull' which is activated in all sorts of adult settings when class origins become apparent—to one party, at least:

> And I? I will do everything and anything until the end of my days to stop anyone ever talking to me like that woman talked to my mother. It is in this place, this bare, curtainless bedroom that lies my secret and shameful defiance. I read a woman's book, meet such a woman at a party (a woman now, like me) and think quite deliberately as we talk: we are divided: a hundred years ago I'd have been cleaning your shoes. I know this and you don't. (1986, p. 2)

The voice of the pit bull is fuelled by a history of silence, a lack of space in which to speak of what is compelling but inchoate, an earned conviction that no one will listen, and frustration at not knowing exactly what to say or who to be, Childers explains. Its counterpoint is 'the parrot':

> The parrot echoes what she is expected to say, and the pit bull defies others in ultimately ineffective ways. In either case, what is said is both interesting

> in itself and shadowed by what is not said. Assertiveness without any expectation of audience or dialogue echoes loudly in the speaker's own mind. The difficulties of speaking of gender and class as simultaneous sources of oppression that shape one's entire development are exacerbated when one knows that it is unseemly to admit that even one's rhetorical strategies are infused with feelings like a sense of inferiority. (p. 210)

My understanding of my own experience of class remained inchoate for many years, as I puzzled over how it happened that being a 'clever girl' mysteriously changed from being a source of admiration and encouragement to being something that represented 'getting above yourself', being 'selfish'—being, in effect, 'too clever by half'.

"Is It *Today* I Start School? … Is It *Today*?"

I have come with my mum down the stairs from the two-bedroomed council flat in which my parents, my two sisters and I live, into my father's butcher's shop. I am desperate to follow my big sisters into school. Once I start, I love it. And when I'm not at school, I'm hanging around the shop, watching my dad at work, watching my mum helping out, watching them both interacting with customers—my dad who gets on with everyone, my mum who somehow conveys to me the subtle distinctions she makes between those customers who meet her aspirational criteria and those who are 'common'. When I'm older, I'll go on 'the rounds' with my mum—delivering weekly orders to the customers on the 'back estate'—more council housing built in the wake of post-war slum clearance from the West End of town—where the distinctions she makes will be reinforced.

In first-year juniors I get the ruler across my hand for some misdemeanour I didn't commit. My mum is up to school like a shot and in her pit bull voice tells the teacher "My daughter does not lie. If she says she didn't do it, she did not do it". The teacher apologises. Later, she tells me something else about lying. We are in the back yard behind the shop where she is pegging out washing. This time, she suspects that I *am* lying about something, and her words ring in my ears. "Just you remember

this, my girl … ('my girl' is always portentous) … if you're going to tell lies, you need a very long memory!" Designed to let me know that she will always discover the truth in the end (and there are certainly occasions growing up when I am convinced that she is omniscient—before I realise that she's read my diary) the lesson I actually learn from this admonishment is not never to lie, but to develop a good enough memory to do so more successfully—especially when telling the truth threatens unbearable reprisals.

A few years after moving to 'The Shop' we got our first car, a second-hand navy Austin. At home, it was a source of great delight but at school it was a source of torment—visible evidence to my classmates that we were 'rich', thereby setting me permanently apart. Teachers were always a source of refuge for me, although, ironically, the one my mother consulted prior to my starting school was responsible for laying the ground for my later sense of exclusion. Just before we moved, she asked my sisters' old Headmistress which school in our new neighbourhood I should attend. She had aspirations for us girls, presumably not unrelated to the fact that both she and my dad had had to sacrifice their own education in order to contribute to their respective family finances. My sisters had already been put through their jumps by having to stop every time they passed the living-room curtains to chant the times tables she had written out and pinned up there. And they were sent to elocution lessons. I think the fiercely authoritarian headmistress at their primary school, whom my mother feared but respected, must have known the head at the newly built school she recommended for me. We were outside its catchment area, but my mother was keen to follow her advice, so that's where I went, rather than to the school attended by all the other children in our new neighbourhood. It is desperately ironic, therefore, in light of my mother's aspirations, that the area in which the new school was built—and consequently the children who attended it—represented everything from which she wished to 'protect' us. It was (and still is) bang in the middle of a deprived, run-down, high crime area—referred to recently by someone I spoke to who works in the public sector there as 'the dark side' of the city.

I was always well dressed. Kuhn suggests that for a mother, 'dressing up' a daughter is "a socially sanctioned opportunity for a woman, in car-

ing for the little girl in herself, to love herself; while at the same time providing her with the opportunity to display, for the pubic gaze, the praiseworthy qualities of an adult who puts the needs of others above her own: a good mother, in other words, and therefore a good woman" (1995, pp. 50–51). But it made me stand out from my peers at school, who for some reason I didn't understand, traditionally got new clothes only at Whitsuntide. Worse still, I apparently 'talked posh.' Despite my own lack of elocution lessons, I had learned to perform one of my sisters' practice pieces, with an exhalation of air at the appropriate point: "We're going to sweep the dirt away – Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!" I giggingly recited it with them but certainly didn't talk like this anywhere else. (Now, in line with Skeggs' 2012 account of depictions of the working classes as 'dirt' and 'waste', I think of this poem as encapsulating what my mother wanted to do: sweep the 'dirt' of her earlier life away, protect us from the contamination of the gutter.)

Despite my longing for friends, I was quickly labelled by my classmates as 'snobby'. I was marked by the fact that I wasn't allowed to wear my hair in a fringe like all the other girls, because it was one of the many things that was common. Mine was worn in bunches tied with bows or plaited and looped up into 'doorknockers.' Grooming each other's ponytails was a playtime activity of female communion and solidarity, but I didn't experience much of that. I did achieve temporary group membership by virtue of a Vanity Case to keep your 'jewels' in. Why a Vanity Case was permitted as not common was a mystery but I didn't enquire. I loved it so much! Later, plastic jewellery was replaced by a silver charm bracelet with charms added at Birthdays and Christmases; and then a musical jewellery box to house it, whose lid lifted to reveal a twirling ballerina with a lace tutu stiffened with sugar. Such early tutoring in matters of taste! Such a precarious business, trying to divine what was common and what was not. For me, for a period, so many of the things I wanted seemed to be common or in some other way prohibited. And yet, at this time, the family story was that I was 'spoilt'. And it's true that lots of toys came my way. As 'the baby of the family' I was very close to my mother, sleeping snug and secure on her lap in the front seat of the car on the way home from day-trips to the 'country', my face buried in the fur collar of her coat. But I didn't have any neighbourhood friends because local

children were deemed too common and in any case would 'want to know our business'; and we lived too far away from school for anyone casually to come round to play. So at home I learned to play alone and although at school I played skipping, hopscotch, two-ball against the wall and 'marlies', by the upper juniors when games progressed to chasing, I was never chased.

And then, miraculously, I was.

By Roy.

I was unaware of what lay ahead.

Beaufort Street School

It was so new that the road hadn't been made up.
Coming from where I lived, the bus only took you so far
so you got off and walked a mile or so
then picked your way across pot-holes and cinders
and under the road through a tunnel
whose walls soon bore misspelt testimony
to the efforts of teachers still weary since demob
and their bright-eyed fresh young colleagues.
You could check the time as you emerged into the light
by the art deco numberless clock
on the sand-coloured square chimney tower
then run the last stretch up the slope
if you were late
to burst through
the reinforced glass
double doors.

Living furthest away didn't help
No-one to call for after school
to ask or be asked:
"You playing out?"
Talking posh compounded it
although I hadn't noticed the difference and
having a shop definitely meant you were rich.
I knew that wasn't true
but no point protesting
that the shop was just

'council' like the flat above,
that you shared a bed with your sister
just like them and jumped
just like them
at a knock at the door
in case it was the rent man
who could come in any time
and inspect if he wanted.

It wouldn't have washed in the face of
all the other evidence.
No good waving a rent book
as a membership card
even if I'd known to try it.
The kids who lived nearby
were off-limits too
They were 'Customers' Children'
and we didn't want them
Knowing our Business.

Getting a car finally clinched it.
Not that I boasted but
it was there for all to see
the times I got picked up from school
("Your mam's waiting for you."
"Thanks!") Oblivious
to the nuances in that message,
still thinking I had friends despite the signs
I'd joyfully set off at a run
and leave them behind
alienating them with each step.
As I clambered in to be carried away
did I even wave to them like the Queen?

Perhaps by then the damage had already been done.
In place of the cold sores and warts and
gentian violet marking the impetigo spots,
I sported shining eyes, shining face, shining

hair in bunches and bows or
plaited into door-knockers.
Sensible shoes polished every morning before breakfast,
white socks making daisy petals in summer sandals.
Younger sister to the Little Princesses.
Opportunities to belong were few and far between.
Those woollen hats with plastic alice-band stitched in,
a pom-pom dangling down the back,
the wanting filling you to bursting…?
Too common! How I envied them.

The very morning I was told Your Grandad's Died,
a funeral cortege drove slowly past the window
of the Assembly Hall during prayers
so I *knew* it was him in the coffin.
This was the stuff of life they recognized.
Bliss on both sides to share the drama and the sorrow.
But in general I offered too little
of the kind of adversity that could have united us.
Once I remember the tables half-turned:
No new clothes for Whitsun?
Poor cow!
A ritual dependent I guess now
on local firms' annual two-week break.
For that short period of time they could see
their treats as my deprivation.

It seemed strange to me
only to get new clothes once a year
but it gave no cause to crow.
I did not think myself better after all.
They were superior in so many ways.
Not bad at two-ball up against the wall and
strong enough at turning the skipping rope,
agile too at jumping in when my turn came
to join the line and keep in sync,
competent enough to do
the smart one-two at hop-scotch -

but on the playing field in summer
when they did hand-stands up the bank,
tippled over to arch their bellies
and walk like a crab,
I was too afraid.
Could only get half way up.
Too stiff to bend.
Not reckless enough
to turn the world upside down.

In those years before only
me and the caretaker's daughter
passed the eleven-plus
I was such a slow learner.
Still joining in all the games of kiss-chase across the playground,
only just noticing that I never got caught,
that they had all disappeared to play something else
while I was still bent over hands on knees behind the line,
laughing and out of breath with the excitement of it all…
when there was Roy
talking to me in the playground
three days on the trot.
Blond-haired Roy, skin brown with muck and sun,
muscly already and mouthy with it,
Cock-of-the-walk Roy, a fast runner
began to chase.
But I didn't get chance
to slow down.

On the way home without warning
(although from the shouts of support it was clear
that plans had been hatched)
the Poor Cow got jumped in the tunnel.
Dark-haired Elaine who
knew a thing or two I didn't
Big-for-her-age Elaine who wore a bra,
publicly staking her claim
the way she knew best,

("Get her on the ground!")
bringing me down,
taking fistfuls of hair as a trophy
"That'll teach you to steal my boyfriend!"

Incapacitated by shock and inexperience
and the idea barely-articulated
even to myself that
there had been some mistake.
No chance to explain my innocence
To say it was only a game
whose rules I didn't know anyway.
Maybe I was coming round to fighting back
when the cry went up?
("Er mam's comin!")
Someone had been the bearer of bad tidings.
Someone had had that thrill.
Had seen the car and 'told'.

As they legged it smartish it was my turn
to be left behind
relieved and humiliated by rescue.
No bones broken but
my dislocation written in stone
in the tunnel under the road.

It seems obvious to me now that for my mother the bogey-man status of the rent man whose powers stretched beyond collecting revenue to an entitlement to come into your home to make sure you were living according to some externally imposed standards was simply her "You'll-never-amount-to-anything" teacher in another guise, just another example of the surveillance to which the borderline-respectable were subject. In the fourteen years we lived above the shop, no rent man ever crossed the threshold, but Foucault's (1985) panopticon, his concepts of 'disciplinary power' and 'technologies of the self' made immediate sense to me when I learned about them years later.

I did have two friends in the juniors for a while, both of whom lived near the bus stop where I got off in the mornings. At different periods,

I would call for each of them to walk the rest of the way together: Pamela, the caretaker's daughter and Rholda. Calling for Rholda, I noticed that, unlike her, her mum was white. Did she notice me noticing? I don't know. I know I was pleased to have a new friend and to be allowed to step inside her house to wait for her in the mornings. I knew the etiquette around going into other people's houses. I didn't presume to go in without being invited or to sit down unless asked. So why was her mum not very friendly towards me? Not hostile, but cool. I was puzzled by this. I was sure I had done everything right. I asked Rholda to come over to play and one Saturday, she actually made the bus journey and came! My mother's reaction to Rholda was more than cool. After she'd gone home my mother told me that I mustn't ask her again. Why not? Because she was 'coloured', my mother explained, my father felt it would be 'bad for business'. Really? I couldn't imagine it—he'd been perfectly nice when she arrived in the shop, had smiled and welcomed her and bade us enjoy ourselves. And if my mother was right, *why* would it be 'bad for business'? Looking back, I speculate that Rholda's mother's coolness towards me was anticipatory, born out of just such experiences. "Part of what drives disconcerting personal writing that reaches for political significance", Childers (2002) writes, "is the implicit conviction that telling stories with an awareness of analytically elusive complexity may stimulate concepts, rhetorics and structures for grasping more surely the tensions and simultaneity of race, class, and gender". Recreating that incident, it is my turn to feel shame in the face of the 'tensions' inherent in the simultaneity of race, class and gender that were operating there, in an instance of everyday racism that Rholda and her mother must have experienced frequently in the 1950s and beyond.

I was one of four in my class to pass the 11-plus. After learning at primary school that I was a 'posh rich snob', it gradually became apparent at grammar school that I was the only person in my peer group who lived in a council flat rather than being an 'owner-occupier'. Not that they were aware of it, but I was. In the summer term when I would give the school bus a miss and join the others lazily spilling out of school to walk home across the park, I saw a very different way of life—first from the outside, then from occasionally being invited in and eventually by deciphering their talk. I saw that they were 'middle-class' and that I, despite

all my mother's efforts, was still 'working-class.' *They* had jugs rather than milk bottles on the table; they didn't rush to scoop up pyjamas discarded on the living-room floor after dressing in front of the coal fire (the only source of heat in the flat) and hide them under the seat of the armchair on those rare occasions when there was an unexpected knock at the door; in any case, having someone call at their house didn't seem to be a cause for panic as it was at mine.

My friends' mothers didn't do paid work either. One friend came from a large Quaker family. Her father was something important at the 'Min of Ag and Fish'[1] (conveyed in the telling by a note of 'distinction') and her mother baked. At least, whenever I walked home with her in the summer and was asked to stay for a while to sit in the garden (no 'back yard' there), there always seemed to be parkin[2] cooling on a rack, still warm from the oven. They also had honey on their toast. I'd never had honey but somehow I knew intuitively what it stood for ("And is there honey still for tea?"). Their 'sitting room' had a big squashy settee which they called a 'sofa'. And framed paintings on the wall. Her father sometimes 'wrote.' I don't know what, but she once asked me to go with her to show a piece of her father's writing to our beloved English teacher, for comment. We stood outside the staffroom. He came. She gave him the document. She made a joke. They laughed. Hovering behind her, I felt in every sense an outsider. They shared a world I was only beginning to glimpse.

At some point at home, meanwhile, reading (aka 'having your nose buried in a book') had somehow become transgressive. My sisters had left home and my mother had made it clear that my staying on after sixteen had been an indulgence too far. Once 'A' levels were done, it would definitely be time for me to 'earn my keep'. So when my teachers appeared to take it for granted that I would go to university, I faced a dilemma. There had been 'money troubles' at home and despite free tuition, she insisted that university was unaffordable. Pointing out that I'd get a full maintenance grant didn't wash. It didn't occur to me at the time that the requisite means-testing represented for my mother another example of

[1] Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

[2] A kind of gingerbread cake originating in Yorkshire.

surveillance—an intrusion into 'our business'. Eventually we had to give up the lease on the shop. Uncomplainingly, my dad got a labouring job at a local power station and my mum got an office job at Rolls Royce, where, miraculously, she seemed happier. There were tales of what 'the girls' at work had been up to and a constant source of things being bought and sold 'on the QT' at bargain prices. Nevertheless, these days, everything I said or did seemed to cause her grief. "Just you wait till you have children!" had become her refrain. Now, being 'spoilt' meant something else.

Occasionally I 'answered back' when under attack but mostly I kept my mouth shut on the basis that it would blow over sooner. There would be frosty silences for days and then the thaw would set in—until the next row over some heinous new crime of mine—with raising the subject of going to university the most serious of these. School was still my refuge. I loved my 'A' levels and had enough space in the Lower Sixth timetable to add a tenth 'O' level (Domestic Science—which I had rejected earlier in favour of more 'academic' subjects) to the nine I had. Boys arrived in the cookery room to eat whatever I had made but in the diaries I kept at the time, I am constantly bemoaning my lack of a boyfriend. Reading them now, I see an embarrassing mixture of someone very young for her years and one whose tactic for attracting boys is to be clever and amusing and sophisticated in a way that was probably read as aloof or superior—or maybe just ridiculous. My diary records that one new arrival into the Sixth Form from the Secondary Modern, whom I fancied for a while, and who flirted with me but never asked me out, mentioned me to another girl (who left before taking her 'A' levels, in the end). After learning of my nine 'O' levels, he said to her: "Jackie's not like us, is she?" Another lesson that being 'too clever by half' (a favourite accusation of my mother's now) was a disadvantage when it came to boys. While I'm sitting at home longing for one of them to fancy me and turning down occasional invitations to the parties my mother forbade me to go to, they are 'getting off' with girls whose mothers were more relaxed, or else (according to my diary), they were riding over to 'The Dungeon Club' in Nottingham on their scooters to participate in the provincial version of the Swinging Sixties.

What I could do, under my mother's tutelage in dress-making, was join the Swinging Sixties through clothes. I had a couple of role models

to emulate: while my eldest sister (who had preceded me at the grammar school) was wearing 'pencil skirts' or capri-pants and a 'Sloppy Joe' and listening to Frank Sinatra, my peroxide-blonde middle sister was going to the *Locarno* where, in a midnight-blue-and-silver full-skirted brocade dress and stilettos, she effortlessly attracted men. It was a continuation, for the three of us, of a parting of the ways in class terms that had begun when she failed her 11-plus, left school at fifteen and trained at the local 'Tech' to be a hairdresser. She was allowed far more latitude than my eldest sister or I enjoyed, because as soon as she became 'a worker' she was treated as an adult. Staying on at school and being 'sophisticated'-but-selfish versus earning (and keeping some) money and having fun. Which way to go? Who to be?

I sought guidance from books, starting with Charlotte Bingham's coming-out-as-a-debutante novel *Coronet Amongst the Weeds* (which at least allowed me the fantasy that I was rejecting a succession of 'Chinless Wonders' as opposed to being rejected by those with and without chins) and then a book called *In Search of Charm*.

The latter imparted all the necessary information about how to walk, sit and stand; how to get in and out of sports cars; which gloves to wear with which style of evening dress and how to remove them ("Take a firm but feminine grip") before eating. '*She*' magazine described it as "A wise, cheerful, well-illustrated survey of what a young girl needs to know about being grown up". The blurb on the back, for some strange reason, also quotes the *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, which assured readers that it was "the perfect *vade mecum* for the teenager who does not want to make gaffes". I have nothing against Wolverhampton but even then, when my school friends and I were going around speaking French to each other like Lyn Barber in her autobiography, or ironically quoting a James Thurber cartoon to each other ("It's a naïve little Burgundy without any breeding but I think you'll be amused by its presumption"), the image that this conjured up of a group Wolverhampton teenagers gathered round a copy, while its owner is saying "No, honestly girls, it's absolutely just the perfect *vade mecum*!" seemed preposterous. Instead I bought *Vogue* or *Butterick* dress patterns, cheap fabric from the market and made 'dolly-rocker' dresses.

Still the rows at home continued, until my father's last-minute support prevailed (Goode 2018b) and I was allowed to at least *apply* for university. Like Hanley (2016), I hadn't a clue what to expect from interviews that placed me at the "intersections of opportunity and obstacles" (Childers 2002, p. 218). At Durham, my interview with the Head of Sociology was disastrous. He asked about social class and its indicators. I talked about appearance and how people talk—what I would later learn to refer to variously as the 'presentation of self', 'doing class' or 'doing gender'. I guess for me, then, both of these were delineated by the binaries of *posh* and *common*. In terms of learning how to position myself as a woman in the wider social order, I had been tutored in reading class indicators off the body: how women dressed (a 'good coat'—*so* important) and how they spoke ('Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!'). He was disdainful and led me doggedly towards definitions based on occupation. But sociology wasn't on the school syllabus and it wasn't a male world of work that had taught me what I knew about class. In any case, back then, sociological analyses of class tended to feature 'households' and women were still largely hidden inside them. And since they were not the 'heads' of these households, they were literally 'counted out'. What I knew of occupational life came from observing my parents' work lives; listening to our female customers wondering what they could give their husbands for tea and asking my dad to put purchases "on the slate"; going into houses on the estate with my mother when we 'did the rounds'; witnessing them talk about husbands who didn't give them enough housekeeping, or showing her a half-formed foetus in the toilet bowl to confirm the miscarriage that had happened minutes before her arrival; home-from-school parkin, a house with sofas and paintings and a father employed by the 'Min of Ag and Fish'. It would be another thirty years before vocabulary and accent (Hey 1997), clothes and style (Reay 1997) were written about in relation to class status and formation.

A week after my interview, my mother's worst fears were confirmed. My diary records that after revising 'In Memoriam' I had got dinner ready for when she got in from work. After dinner, she picked up the paper. Fatal! Right there was an article about students at Edinburgh university wanting the pill to be made available to students on demand and Malcolm Muggeridge's resignation as Rector because of their immorality:

> She proceeded to read it out to me, including, unfortunately, a comment by some girls from Durham University saying something about a university education teaching you to rely on your own judgement and not necessarily accepting the moral code of the last generation – 'So now you know what they think at Durham before you get there!' she spat out.

But I was only put on the waiting list at Durham and accepted an offer from Newcastle instead. When I left home for university, it was I think with a real need to see the world in more benign terms than my mother's legacy had bequeathed. I chose instead what my father never articulated but simply demonstrated—the idea that people are basically OK and that it's quite easy to get on with any and all of them. I set out with the conviction that sowing what you reap (aka "You've made your bed, now you can lie on it!") could apply equally well to a generalised goodwill to others. Childers observes, "Umbrage and seething accusation are self-limiting, cognitive stopping points for maneuvering through the pain of never knowing when someone will think you inferior or you will experience them as superior. Umbrage does not conquer cumulative trauma; it announces its persistence" (p. 211). Rebellion was driving my chosen stance. Quite useful as a transitional mechanism to power you on to somewhere else but pretty maladaptive as a permanent life-position. Potentially risky in fact, since you do need a certain amount of 'nous' in life. Unsurprisingly, I got my fingers burnt a few times but that was all part of growing up not covered by *In Search of Charm*.

For much of my adult life, I felt as though I was permanently in transition, always trying to be someone else/get somewhere else, never arriving, never just being. I continued to occupy a 'liminal space', torn between the mind-expanding worlds of the middle-class fine arts students with whom I shared a house in Newcastle and the ideological strictures of the miner's daughter from Gateshead with whom I made friends on my degree course. But by the time I went home at the end of the first term, I was already, as my mother had feared, a different person—more confident and less cowed by her, even when (as I recorded in the diary that slowly petered out over the next few years) she and my dad and I have a 'discussion' over dinner about students/university life, which: "…according to Mum … makes students selfish – they come out thinking that the

world owes them a living and they live it up and sit out (*sic*) on protests, wasting the country's money that she and people like her have slaved for". But she knew she could no longer stop me going out and I had a great time that year at a Christmas party, dancing with my old school friends to 'Hey Jude', wearing a home-made mini-dress, red leather boots, red suede coat and floppy wide-brimmed hat.

Sociological theorisations of class began to unlock so much that I had experienced but not understood. At school, I hadn't known the name of this key, and certainly no-one at that all-white conservative little grammar school with its ex-Wykemist Headmaster was going to provide it. Nevertheless, having been kept away from 'rough kids' at home and from the 'B' and 'C' streams at school, university proved even more confusing in terms of what the 'right' credentials were. I no longer belonged to the class my mother had initially striven to escape from nor to the one she aspired to. While I was learning the theory, experientially within the student group I once more occupied the margins. It was the time of (the corrupt Labour Council Leader) T. Dan Smith, who led a huge redevelopment programme in the city (taking bribes in the process).

Our sociology lecturer was a left-wing activist. He admired his older colleague who was very involved with local communities and who had published an ethnography of the local coal mining industry. Our lecturer also got involved in opposing slum clearance in the Rye Hill area of Newcastle. Clearly seeing himself as a 'man of the people', he gathered a small inner coterie of students around him with whom he used to meet in the pub. But despite the coaching from the miner's daughter, I wasn't one of them. And I was stung by the sarcastic comments he used to write on my faltering essays. *He* evidently didn't think I demonstrated the correct class credentials (reinforcing once again my confusion around where I did 'fit') and so deserved 'put downs'. It wasn't until after I graduated (and years before he moved from Sociology to Religious Studies and he and his more senior colleague published with the Social Affairs Unit and the Institute of Economic Affairs, respectively), that I resorted to a 'put-down' of my own (in the safety of my revived diary) in order, I suppose, to repair a kind of reverse 'hidden injury of class' (Sennett and Cobb 1972), inflicted on the student he didn't think was class-warrior enough:

Newcastle Preacher Man 1969

He's a good communicator all right
He stands proudly at the front and plants his legs apart
to show us he's important. A veritable Colossus
He wears his shirt sleeves rolled up high
in mourning for his lost identity
as manual worker. Unfortunately the badge
he has to wear says only lecturer. But he knows the locals
drinks with them, invites the chosen few to join him
He worships at the altar of the poor
He's on their side. More: their Saviour
Poverty is his business. What
would he do without it?

He intones the magic words
'Rye Hill' – slum clearance he would like to halt
He's an evangelical: he casts out Theory
Preaches Activism instead. Each week
he performs his litany of misery
Invokes the holy trinity of Death, Disease, Decay
and blasts them with his angry fire
and brimstone. It is a matchless performance
He nurtures his adoring flock, although
unlike the Original (whose influence can be found
not too far back, I'd guess, on his mother's side)
he ignores the blind and lame in the congregation

And the multitude of dim-witted, too slow
to recognise his credentials. Why, see his muscles!
See those bulging biceps! Aren't they evidence enough
Oh ye of little faith? If he flexes them
and expands his chest much harder
he'll burst out of his shirt like some comic book hero
Occasionally he quotes selected passages of scripture:
reverentially he opens his mate's new book
He only wishes he could say that
Coal had been His Life. Sadly

words are his life
Preferably his own

My father died at the end of my second year, followed nine years later, when I was half-way through an M. Phil, by my mother. She had held her counsel during my (Home Office-funded) post-graduate year to qualify as a Probation Officer but despaired when I left the Probation Service after three years to re-train as a teacher. Moving on from there after another three years to take up a funded studentship in Education simply confirmed her continuing view of me as 'selfish' and 'work-shy'. She was not around for the award of my Masters or for the birth of my first child immediately afterwards or to see that I worked part-time from then until my second son started school—at which point, I returned to full-time work and took up my first post at the start of what turned out to be a twenty-year career as an academic researcher. But her voice was still in my head. Perhaps because of hearing it, re-entering the academy felt for me, initially at least, like 'coming home'. Home away from home. Like being back with 'the clever ones'. It feels (typically for women) uncomfortable writing something as immodest as that but I had, after all, invested a great deal in my clever girl identity; and if my mother had never expressed any pride in me (at least not to me—my sisters told me later that she boasted to customers of my achievements while I was away), I needed to find it for myself. One of the things we learn as 'grown ups' (even if it takes till middle-age) is how to meet our own needs, to find affirmation in other places: in later life I renewed contact with my old English teacher and with some encouragement from him was emboldened enough to send him an article. "You can write!" he wrote back. In response and in gratitude, I paid homage—in writing—to his tutoring (Goode 2007).

So what would I say from my autoethnographic account about lived experiences of class and gender? To some extent my story chimes with a common thread in accounts from clever girls of my generation (Cosslett 2000), in which unkind, unloving, resentful or 'witholding' mothers feature (Kingston 1976; Chernin 1983; Forster 1996; Lorde 2001). Others contributed to a genre of more explicitly 'tell-all' memoirs, from Joan Crawford to Jeanette Winterson and Lorna Sage. Admittedly, a lot is expected of the mother. As Lawler (2000) observes, "Her task is to pro-

duce the good well-managed self, which will uphold democracy", adding importantly that "this is a vision of social harmony which is based on the radical expulsion and othering of groups deemed excessive, repulsive, threatening" (p. 2). Charged thus, she has long attracted blame, not least from her daughters. Childers challenges processes of identity formation that rest exclusively on vilifying another, however, on the grounds that: "Writing in this way not only protects identity, it rigidifies it through disidentification with the other, who is recruited only to represent the source of oppression". Furthermore, it "reduces politics to an individual exchange" (2002, p. 211). Scott and Scott (2000) seem to me to be an exception to such individualisation in the way they locate *their* mother's 'pit bull' tendencies within a broader social, historical and political context. I hope I have done the same—by recognising, if only after her death, that my mother's changing relationship with me may have arisen not only from the class-related shame and stigma she experienced in childhood; from envy, perhaps, of opportunities lost to her which I claimed; and from disappointment with a husband whom she saw as having 'failed' to provide her with the middle-class housewife status to which she aspired, necessitating her having to work in the shop herself (far from becoming 'no bugger's skivvy' she felt she had become 'every bugger's skivvy'); but from the financial difficulties that accrued. Perhaps she felt that I abandoned her financially to 'manage' alone, as well as abandoning her in psychoanalytic terms by finally achieving a measure of separation/independence (see Griffin 2004 on "the tension between 'good' and 'bad' girls", growing up and on the "impossibility of being or becoming a successfully 'grown up' female subject", p. 30). We never had an adult–adult conversation about it but I hope I have recognised here not only the "deep ambivalence and complexity" of the mother–daughter relationship (Lawler 2000, p. 6), but the complexities of the class and gender politics that shaped her.

And she bequeathed me other things besides a determination to avoid her resentments. Hey (2006) suggests we should see subjectivity less as a final surface and more as a 'palimpsest' through which we can envisage the laying down of former as well as current affiliations and investments. What do I see when I look through the film? Inherited elements of (working) class-related cultural capital emerge: a love of 'nice things'; a love of

the countryside—landscapes of hills, trees, dry stone walls, streams, stepping stones, blue-bell woods, catkins and pussy-willow (passed down from the cycling trips into 'the country' that she made in the 1930s, along with lots of other working-class people—including my dad whom she met on one such trip—all enjoying a new-found 'leisure time'); an enduring pleasure in deploying an 'eye for a bargain'; a facility for creating a home 'on a budget'; dress-making abilities, which nevertheless don't stretch as far as her smocking skills or her ability to 'run up' a garment in a couple of hours from a pattern made from newspaper; and cooking skills which are sadly no longer deployed in the production of a wonderful oxtail stew with fluffy suet dumplings bobbing up and down in it.

Like Steedman, I am interested in the actual bodies (as well as the legally defined personae) of *labourers* as opposed to the abstract entity of 'capital' (see Maslen 2013). My parents' relationship to capital as (ultimately unsuccessful) small shop-keepers leasing a council-owned shop and flat is an ambiguous one, but there is no doubt about the extent to which they both laboured. I hope that in following this tradition of an *embodied* notion of class (including its psychic/emotional components) I have also problematised simplistic conceptualisations of working-class status as a 'unitary' category. In reading Steedman's defiance in her memory of the health visitor, Childers observes that it is difficult to know "when an act of grieving and accusing is regressive or productive for an individual or a moment of class conflict" (2002, p. 212). Hey (2006) on the other hand suggests that an either/or duality can be avoided by understanding Steedman's narration instead as expressing the inherently contradictory subject bequeathed by class awareness. In autobiographical accounts in which class is theorised as the "contradictory identity work of hyphenated subjectivity", she says, "class as 'natural', binary, intrinsic and nominal falls" (p. 304).

From early on, before I occupied the psychosocial space between two class locations, I was caught between the contradictions in my parents' biographies: between my father's genial acceptance of a 'lot' in life that he didn't choose (apprenticed to a butcher at fourteen despite being bright enough to 'stay on' at school)—a fate he didn't want for me; and my mother's curdled aspirations for 'betterment'—for 'good' clothes, nice things, for *more than* mere respectability—in effect, for a middle-class

lifestyle that our 'business' ultimately couldn't support despite her 'sacrifices' (but from which I undoubtedly benefitted in material terms). Grammar schools which privileged the lucky few like me but not the equally deserving many are re-appearing but the social mobility my status as a clever grammar school girl gave me has disappeared for the vast majority of young people, regardless of ability and educational achievement; and it is the working classes and some minority ethnic groups who are still faring worst (Nandi and Platt 2010; Reay 2017). I feel gratitude not only for all the 'goods' that in my childhood were simultaneously expressions of my mother's love for me (and, by proxy, for her 'deprived' self) and a public display of our achievements as a family, but also for the access I gained to what lay through the door that my higher education opened. Even though I 'succeeded', however, the emotional costs of my mother's overwhelming disappointment were high. As a consequence, alongside the gratitude, I feel a deep sadness—for all that we both lost in the split.

There are still moments when I am conscious of class-related dislocations. Accent remains a powerful indicator of classed embodiment (Addison and Mountford 2015; Loveday 2016; Donnelly et al. 2019) but I sometimes make mistakes. A doctor friend never lets me forget that because of his elongated vowels ('barth' as in 'hearth', not 'bath' as in 'path'), I had supposed when we first met that he came from a middle-class background. In reality, he grew up in a poor area of London in a terraced house with an outside toilet. (Turned out his accent was southern rather than 'posh'). And dislocations sometimes crop up when I visit my middle sister. "Will you stay for a bit of lunch, love…" she asks, offering "…just a salad sandwich…?" White sliced bread and butter holding lettuce, tomatoes and cucumber, laced with salad cream. I have not tasted its like for years. It is delicious and comforting. It is a coming home to an imagined place that no longer exists. Madeleines have nothing on salad cream. Another time we go out for lunch and take a detour to the (owner-occupied) house now lived in by the customer from the estate, who suffered the miscarriage, and with whom my mother actually made friends. Of course my sister, still living in our home town, has kept in touch with her over the years, just as she has with a long list of people whose names

she insists I must remember. Conversations about them follow a recognised format:

"Oh, by the way, you remember Sheila Doughty[3]…?"
"Er, no, I don't think so…"
"You do! She lived down Morley Road"
"No…"
"You *do*! She used to go out with Barry – married Phil in the end, brother of that lad that worked at the Railway who had a motorbike accident…"
"Erm….?"
"*You* know! Her sister worked at Royce's till she got pregnant…"
"Oh ok … (giving up protesting) … what about her?"
"She's dead."

And then there's the way *I* talk: without an identifiable accent I'm told (apart from my flat vowels), but probably indicative of someone who has spent a lot of time in higher education and therefore at risk of the scorn reserved by some members of the working class for those with 'pretensions', who are seen to be 'putting on airs' (Skeggs 2012) or having what the Irish call 'notions' (McInerney 2019).

We have arrived at the former customer's house. My sister ushers me in as the door is opened. "You remember Jackie, don't you?" The two of them settle into tea and reminiscences. I smile and nod along. I try to join in. I've only spoken a few words when my mother's friend casts me a look. "Still too clever by half" it says.

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[3] All names are fictionalised.

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6

Common Ground

Nell Farrell

My Dad's Books

Stuffed into the sideboard,
tumbling out with table mats
and a tin of mismatched cutlery.

Room At the Top, The Virgin Soldiers,
Saturday Night and Sunday Morning,
Couples, Where Eagles Dare.

On the covers men in shadows
or in uniform, sometimes
a curvy woman in her underslip

sitting on a bed or outside
in the rainy street, radiant
in headscarf and a belted mac.

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Tales of the factory, the office,
the war, the pub; in gangs,
in crowds, no kids and no daft questions.

National Service, sex and swearing,
unwanted pregnancies and how to
mount a raid on a German stronghold.

I've been trying to finish this poem for years, because my dad's books were such an important part of my journey to being a 'clever girl'. I took them out of the sideboard, one by one and made off with them, devoured them. There were others too like Raymond Chandler's thrillers, and a novel called *Buddwing* by an American writer Evan Hunter, which began with the astonishing sentence 'I know what an erection feels like'—at a point where I had absolutely no idea what the word meant. It wasn't porn by the way. He was a wonderful chronicler of adult relationships and heartbreak whose entire oeuvre I was soon tracking down in Eastwood library and reading on the bus to school.

But all of the books I found in there were riveting, full of interesting stuff nobody would ever have told me—and definitely not material the nuns would have endorsed. For quite a while, I wandered round my Catholic Girls' Grammar School with the sergeant major's wake-up call from *The Virgin Soldiers* echoing round my brain: 'Hands off cocks, on with socks'.

It hardly needs saying that I wasn't identifying with the women in most of these stories. They were unhappy wives or bitter, worldly older women, inconveniently pregnant girlfriends or gorgeously elusive rich girls. No particular role models there for a clever girl/tomboy. But the witty, naughty, resourceful energetic men—they were fun! Of course, I can see now that they were also a kind of proxy for my dad who was often absent and unhappy during that time.

The fact that those books were in the house in the first place was significant: contemporary, critically acclaimed paperbacks, many of them rightly regarded as classics today—even if they were stuffed away in the sideboard, not displayed in anything so ostentatiously middle class as a bookcase. I'm a second generation 'clever' child. When I took two buses

from Eastwood to my Catholic Girls' Grammar School in Nottingham, (forty minutes of excellent reading time) I was echoing the start of my dad's own journey from Kilmarnock to Glasgow University to study English Literature.

The first time I read Lynsey Hanley's book *Respectable: The Experience of Class*, I kept encountering myself in it. I kept saying yes, yes, and underlining things softly in pencil. But the second time I read it, thinking about writing this piece, I kept finding my dad. First of all I found his books, all those kitchen sink/angry young man novels of the late 1950s and 1960s, where:

> members of the working class could see themselves represented in ways that for the first time went beyond caricature: young men and women were shown in possession of interior monologues and mixed-up motives… (Hanley 2016, p. 141)

So what my dad had—and what I therefore had access to—were:

> new books, plays and films…that seemed to mirror their experiences and give them reference points from which to make sense of them. (Hanley 2016, p. 141)

The possession of a university-educated parent is generally assumed to promote a family's sure-footed progress up the ladder, isn't it? It's one of the things people will insist upon when they're trying to convince you that you aren't really from a working class background. Which is a thing that happens. But even though I found this amazing treasure trove of books that undoubtedly influenced and shaped my reading, class migration is a bit of a wily snake. My dad went to university but my mum didn't. I went to university but my brother didn't and nor did any of his three daughters.

Middle class status is generally regarded as something to be aspired to, clung on to and built upon, but my dad, despite working in white collar jobs his whole life, remained discernibly more comfortable in working class company than middle class. He chose to locate himself there as a person recognised and valued by his community as 'clever'

but with his significant friendships being with other working class men. Also, my mum's family were in Eastwood and she resolutely refused to move, even when there was the possibility of a more interesting job for my dad somewhere else. For a long time my dad—who had briefly worked as a teacher in Scotland—worked in his father-in-law's betting shop/social club business and so I grew up in a white working class, examining community.

And then, when I was eight or nine, my actual family extended exponentially to take in a whole non-league football club. Eastwood Town Football Club entered our lives because my dad, having attended one match, wrote a letter about some aspect of this experience to the local paper and was promptly (in the way of community groups the world over) invited to join the committee. He did, in time becoming Club Secretary, a position he occupied for over forty years. As well as his administrative duties he wrote match reports for all the local press and for a brief and thrilling period in the 1970s, he had his own radio spot on *Radio Nottingham*.

So I acquired a football team. And a reserve football team, a committee, a ladies' committee who ran the tea bar, a manager, a trainer with his match day bucket and sponge, the people who looked after the pitch and the people who staffed the gates and sold the programmes on match days. And these were all people I knew by name and who knew me. A whole community of adults—some with exceptional football skills and that hint of glamour that comes from doing something well enough for people to come and watch you. In short, I acquired football as a culture:

> A series of unique individuals, in real relationships, learning and contributing to a changing pattern. (Williams, quoted in Hanley 2016, p. 44)

And that culture gave me so many things. Football is very far from perfect but one powerful thing it has given me over many years is a way to connect with other football fans across all kinds of differences in class, age, gender, sexuality and race.

It gave me involvement in—and appropriate bits of responsibility within—the running of a voluntary community organisation (which is where, in one way or another, I've spent most of my own working

life). It gave me confidence—an ability to stand up for myself—in male-dominated culture. It gave me an understanding that you don't have to have gone through further or higher education to be clever and witty and well-read. It gave me an atmosphere of passion and optimism, a world where all the things that needed to be done were being done well by working class people, where the heroes were working class young men who weren't afraid to be good at something and to whom football gave some structure and purpose and expectations and community.

Surprisingly, in a place as well known for being a hotbed of far-right activity as for being the birthplace of D. H. Lawrence, some of those young men were Black—travelling over from much more culturally mixed Nottingham, becoming loved and helping change the atmosphere. Further, over the years, some of the blazered committee members—not just the makers of tea—were women.

Football also gave me a new and interesting way to be clever. The football pools were a big thing back in the 1960s when I was growing up. Our football coupons were delivered and when completed collected again, by our milkman. At the start of each season, he also distributed a little booklet crammed with football facts and information. It listed all the teams in the (then) Football League and Scottish League, alongside a little coloured line drawing of their shirts and shorts, the name of their ground and their team nickname. Already established by this time as a keen reader with a good memory—core components of cleverness—I took possession of this booklet, devouring and memorising its contents, loving all the names and the reasons and the oddities: *Jags, Hatters, Cherries, Toffees, Latics, Rams, Baggies, Bantams, Biscuitmen. City Ground, Baseball Ground, Meadow Lane, Roker Park, Celtic Park, Ibrox.* A veritable litany of symbols, legends and origin stories.

My dad was exceedingly proud of this and would show me off to his friends: 'Go on—ask her anything'. It was a time and a place of peace and connection for us.

I've had an awareness of my dad's class dislocation for a long time. An understanding that uprootedness—even if chosen—can be painful and that solace or alleviation can be sought in alcohol have been on my radar for as long as I've been thinking about my childhood and some of the

factors that shaped it. We all make sense of and manage such influences in different ways. One of the first poems I ever wrote was called *George Best at Fifty* (Farrell 2018) and contained the lines:

> you were working class and gifted,
> uprooted, getting drunk just like my dad

And then, I found this quote from Richard Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy*, where he's exploring his archetype of the clever working class boy uprooted by scholarship into education (which he was himself) and talks about:

> a nervy, intense individual, 'emotionally uprooted' by education from their original class who has yet to find a home in their new socially elevated grouping. (Hoggart, quoted in Hanley 2016, p. 131)

Which I don't think my dad ever really did. I don't think he ever properly 'became middle class'. He was a very clever Catholic boy from a very poor Scottish family who, through his own brain power, made it to Glasgow University. From where he commuted back to Kilmarnock each day, because his family couldn't afford for him to live in Glasgow and he had to work alongside studying. He once told me he couldn't afford to buy a university scarf and that struck me as a powerful and poignant symbol of the whole experience.

Hoggart goes on to say:

> he has to be more alone if he is going to 'get on'. He will have, probably unconsciously, to oppose the ethos of the hearth, the intense gregariousness of the working class family group. (Hoggart, quoted in Hanley 2016, p. 131)

And immediately I made greater sense of my dad locating himself within Eastwood Town Football Club and of his intense, passionate and hard-working attachment to it. It gave him somewhere to fit in. It gave him gregariousness. He didn't have to be so alone. But it also gave him status—it gave him the opportunity for his cleverness to be celebrated and put at the disposal of his community.

> If you are someone equally comfortable in both codes, you have the ability to negotiate a safe register to speak according to the situation you find yourself in. In other words you can bend the ear of those in authority and therefore get things done. (Hanley 2016, p. 43)

No wonder he achieved legendary status for his ability to defend Eastwood Town players in their frequent F.A. disciplinary hearings.

Lynsey Hanley says that one of the myths about social mobility is that individual social mobility has no costs, only benefits. One of the costs for me in going away to University was that I left football behind. For over twenty years, I had nothing to do with it. And then I came back to it. I started travelling over on the train on Saturday afternoons to stand and watch the match with my dad; and to see everyone I grew up with—much older now but still making tea or selling programmes or forking over the pitch when it had rained; and to love another set of players.

And then football gave me one more unexpected thing. It gave me one of the most anxiety-provoking afternoons of my adult life. Someone had surprised my dad with tickets to go and watch Celtic, his other beloved team alongside Eastwood Town. He asked me if I would stand in for him on that particular Saturday and write the match report. I was proud and honoured—and incredibly touched—to be asked and for quite a while I basked in this delightful warm glow. And then as the day approached, raw terror kicked in. I can still summon that particular Saturday afternoon up—palpably, bodily—several years on. I remember striding around the perimeter of the football pitch, notebook in hand with my heart pounding.

It's an away game so I don't know the geography of the place or the people in the same way. Half-time only lasts fifteen minutes and as I'm walking, the distance I have to cross is getting bigger as the time trickles away. I have to get round to the clubhouse, hope no-one else is on the only phone, dial the number of the newspaper I'm reporting for, ask for the right person, and somehow from the scribbled (and anxiously voluminous) notes I've written, miraculously and instantaneously craft a short match report for the early edition of the football paper. Then I need to be back in my seat by the time the whistle blows for the second half, so that I can repeat the nerve-shredding process at full-time. The whole thing is a nightmarish mash-up of an exam you haven't

revised for and those dreams where you repeatedly mis-dial an emergency number as the house burns down around you.

My dad, at this point, had been doing this every week for almost forty years, often without a notebook and usually with several pints inside him, so he couldn't see why I was making so much fuss about it—not an uncommon dynamic in our relationship. He had however let me do a trial run on a midweek match we both attended. He was to 'mark' my report and give me feedback about it. I remember that bit of the process as being terrifying too. I remember walking round our dining room table back in Sheffield, hyperventilating over my notebook. In the end my 'trial' match report was fine. So fine, he said he wouldn't bother to do one himself, he'd just send mine to the paper. It was one of my very proudest moments, but in no way mitigated the trauma of that Saturday afternoon match to come.

Which also, in the end, was fine. In fact, I think my match report made it into the *Nottingham Evening Post*, *The Derby Evening Telegraph* and the *Eastwood and Kimberley Advertiser.* It's some of the writing I feel most proud of—but something I never want to repeat!

So why did it matter so much? On one level of course, it was an existential test of whether I really was 'clever' about football. What if I missed a vital piece of the action? What if I got someone's name or number or position wrong? What if I used the wrong technical term? What if I misunderstood the referee's decision?

But I think it also mattered because of that precious but somehow precarious phenomenon of cultural belonging. One of the lines that resonated most strongly with me from *Respectable* was Lynsey Hanley's observation that class migration can turn us into a 'binary sort of person' who is prim and proper in a rough environment and coarse and chaotic in a posh one. For me—just as for my dad—football can offer a space where that uncomfortable binary-ness disappears.

Grounded

Words I hadn't used in twenty years
still fluent as a mother tongue:
goal-hanging, nutmegged, offside trap,
turn on sixpence, one-two, a great first touch.

Aged nine in duffel coat and new club scarf
I strode off to the Main Gate to sell programmes,
Souza's marches crackling on the tannoy.

In the tea bar women emptied catering packs of coffee
and clouds of fine dried milk into a giant urn
where they were stirred and alchemised
until by kick-off there was milky coffee
in a sturdy sky blue cup.

Mushy peas were ladled into polystyrene pots
and doused with mint sauce decanted
from Cash and Carry jars too big for me to even lift.

At half-time I ruled the sweet display
—three-shelved, glass-fronted—
handing over Wagon Wheels and Mars Bars,
demanding money proudly
on the strength of my own maths.

Out on the touchline for the ninety minutes
the men in overcoats, the hopeful boys,
three players' wives, our full-back's mum and I
screamed out *Man on* and all believed
that in a ground so small we were of help.

Eleven years of Saturdays,
hands freezing, heart bouncing
round those chalked-out lines and semi-circles
a template for elation and despair
indelible as poetry or catechism.

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7

From "Too Womanish, Girl!" to Clever Womanish Woman

Christa Welsh

Introduction

In Britain, as an African Caribbean woman, aspects of my daily life include experiences of racial micro aggression and gendered micro aggression. My account uses Essed's (1991) term 'gendered racism' as an intersectional framework designed to capture the complexity of the oppression experienced by women of Black African ancestry, on the basis of racist perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes of Black womanhood, thereby examining the interconnections of racism and sexism. I also reflect upon the class system and how it is used to support structural racism through the systematic declassification and dislocation of the African Caribbean.

Despite the assumed homogeneity of the African Caribbean 'community', there are very real differences, according to factors such as social class, age, land of origin/descent and spatial locality that inform the experiences of African Caribbean people living in Britain. Historically, African Caribbean people in Britain have faced social inequalities, restricted socioeconomic opportunities and racial discrimination. Powerful examples of institutional racism have recently been revealed by the Windrush

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scandal, arising from governments' 'hostile environment' policies. Despite this, the myth of inclusivity persists, for example, in narratives that characterise the marriage of Prince Harry to an American woman of dual heritage as an attempt to modernise the Monarchy. Alternative narratives of a monarchy recolonising their (Black) subjects or of a more nuanced racism through which a more acceptable measure of 'Blackness' is provided are less prominent.

At the same time, an African Caribbean middle class remains unrecognised and unacknowledged, those who occupy the public domain being perceived either as 'exceptions' or as threats to the 'proper' order of things and therefore needing to be systematically 'kept down' or vilified, as with Diane Abbott, the UK's first Black MP and current Shadow Home Secretary, who has been subjected to more racist and sexist abuse and death threats on social media than any other politician (Dhrodia 2018).

Holding my experiences of oppression as only a *part* of my reality, I was forced while writing this account to take a deep look at my own unique psychology and evaluate my social class and political position in relation to 'race'. Reviewing aspects of my experiences analytically, questioning memories and probing dispassionately to find a version of a truth evoked, at times, overwhelming and conflicting emotions. Inherently a 'Womanist' (Phillips 2006) and Black Feminist, I needed to address these experiences in relation to the imperatives of significant historical moments from both my childhood and professional life and to review their impact on my sense of identity.

Status and Respectability

My parents shared stories of the hardship that they endured as Black immigrants in a 1950s class-bound conservative British 'Motherland', which proved to be an oppressive and cruel place to raise a Black family. Aged three years old, I was sent 'back home' to Grenada to be cared for by my paternal grandmother. Growing up as a member of a majority culture in Grenada in the 1960s, I was not 'Othered'. I had no concept of Race or Class. I experienced 'difference' only in terms of being a child among adults, and I imagined, as children do, that when I became an

adult, I would have more freedom. In Grenada, status replaced race/class but was not considered a static location that you were born into or excluded from. A respectable status could be simply a matter of education, position and respect. How much respect you were shown by others in the community was the measure of your status. I lived with my grandmother in a small outbuilding of the vicarage where she worked as housekeeper and although she was poor and working class in socioeconomic terms, she was well-respected. I didn't know I was poor or feel it. I was the leader of my group of friends so I was respected too.

Learning About Them and Us

On this morning the sun is shining as always, and I am wearing a cotton dress sent by my parents from England. My hair has been greased and pulled into four big plaits and I am not wearing shoes because they pinch my toes. I love to feel the dry hot or dewy soil under my bare feet. I am going to take my friends, who lived in Lance like me, to meet my new friend who lives on the hill. I can't remember how she and I met—it must have been in church. I meet all different kinds of people there who Grandma says are respectable and they are accepting of each other because they all believe in God. My Grandmother never objects to me visiting these kind of God-fearing people.

I have been to visit my new friend a few times on my own. We played with plastic dolls that looked like her, with yellow hair, blue marble eyes and hot pink skin that reminds me of my pet pigs in the yard. I also have dolls like hers that my parents sent me from England. I don't like the hardness of the dolls' bodies, preferring my cloth dolls or the corn dolls I've made myself. I want my new friend to play with all of us in my group of friends and as we climb the hill we share stories and giggle, looking forward to a new adventure. Finally, we reach my friend's house but as we walk towards the unlocked gate, instead of the welcoming smiles from her parents which I have grown accustomed to, my friends and I are shooed away as if we are rabid dogs. Standing outside the locked gate, I push it hard and the woman screams. She is afraid of me and my friends—a group of four children the same age as her daughter. Confused, we stand there staring through the gate. Then my friends and I look at each other. Aren't we the ones who are supposed to be afraid of 'big people'?! We

laugh together as we slowly walk home but I am unsettled. I feel betrayed and enraged by the girl I thought my friend, who just stood there clinging to her mother and shaming me by pretending as she looked at me and my friends that she is also afraid of me. I relay the event to my grandmother, gesturing and mimicking the movements and the expressions of the woman who did fraid me. My grandmother listens at first, trying to keep a straight face, and then, on hearing that we were shooed away, she releases a long slow 'stoops' (sucking her teeth) and then, wearily, she says:

"Leave them People child alone"

and

"Them People fool."

With a small stoops she says:

"You stay there, you are going to meet enough of them in England".

From then on my grandmother 'marks' them as 'them people'. Having lost respect in my grandmother's eyes, they will be shunned by her and therefore, later, the community. As I swagger out of her sight, I can hear her saying:

"Girl—you too womanish".

I know this means that I understand the ways of adult women and am intelligent for my age. I take it as it was meant—a compliment and that I am a clever girl. However, I also know Grandma doesn't like to encourage me.

In the 1960s and 1970s, children were meant to be 'seen but not heard' and 'beating' a child was considered 'good parenting'—a left-over from the colonial and slavery period. My grandmother was not a disciplinarian. She would certainly let me know if she thought I was being disrespectful, and I never appreciated being shamed by being told this. But I was secretly proud of being called womanish—even if this also meant that I was considered spoilt by others in the community!

In Alice Walker's (1983) *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* she offers various definitions of the terms 'Womanish' and 'Womanist' and their relationship to 'feminist' (p. XI). They all make sense of my grandmother's description of me—the references to acting in too grown-up a fashion by being variously outrageous, courageous or wilful; to being traditionally 'universalist' rather than 'separatist'; and to loving such things as music, dancing, food, 'roundness' and the spirit of things. As does her explanation that 'womanist' is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

When I read that many years after that painful incident, I felt validated and affirmed. In a British culture where I struggled to locate myself, my lived experience was authenticated. My identity was a Womanist. Before then though, in 1969, aged nine, I returned to live with my family in the UK as my parents now owned their home. It would be simplistic to say it was a socially progressive time for all. West Indian men had stood and fought against the National Front in the Notting Hill Gate Race Riots and some were being rendered stateless. As a young girl in this context of disruption and social and cultural upheaval, I experienced both physical and emotional racial abuse.

My mother is tired-looking when she comes home from work each evening. I am confused and feel I am a burden. I am also ashamed of my parents because in England they are disrespected and poor. We don't even have a girl to 'help' us with the cleaning, cooking and washing as we did in Grenada. My sister and I are now having to do housework and we both resent having to take turns to wash a bath full of our school clothes every Friday evening.

"My grandmother didn't send me to England to come and wash clothes!"

I feel estranged from my mother who back home would be called very 'speak uppity, proper English.' She insists that I learn to speak the Queen's English and lose my accent. She demands that I do not disgrace myself by fighting or cursing. Back home, at the risk of a beating, I would have cursed her! I feel my mother is trying to change me into my sister who has been brought up by our maternal grandmother—as a proper young lady, well-behaved and respectable. I had often tried in Grenada to be a proper young lady like my sister, who did well at her studies and had even cut the ribbon at the school opening ceremony. I had watched with pride but also feeling a little jealous, as my sister smiled sweetly and was rewarded with admiration for being a proper young lady. Our maternal grandparents were strict and our maternal grandmother did not work. My sister was not allowed out to play and when I visited her at her home, her dolls would be taken out from the glass cabinet in the living room and then put away until I next visited. She was not allowed to raise her voice or speak back to adults. I longed to be like her when I was with her—but without the constant reminder of my paternal grandmother with whom I lived, and who worked, I couldn't do what my sister did—which was to be silent in front of grown-ups and not go outside to play with friends and have adventures. Back in England, I am also groomed

by my mother to become a proper young lady. I no longer swagger when I walk. Instead I keep my back straight and hold my head up high. In England I am not a leader. I am occasionally *a proper young lady. There are other confusions, too.*

"Mummy … Daddy … what do 'Nigger' and 'Black Wog' mean?"

One day on my way home from primary school I see an elderly woman across the road struggling with two large shopping bags. I think to myself 'I know them people funny', but it's a hot sunny day and I am reminded of my grandmother. 'Back home' in Grenada I had been brought up to be respectful and to help the elderly; and my Grandma had said I had to be respectful to everybody in England. So I cross the road to offer the elderly woman help with carrying her shopping. She drops one of her shopping bags to the ground in order to push me away and she screams:

"Nigger! Get away from me, you Black wog!"

I stand there confused and afraid. What is 'nigger'? What is Black 'wog'? I recognise the look in her eyes, though—fear, now mixed with hate.

That elderly woman's violent act of 'racist verbal abuse' towards me wounds me and hurts me so deeply that in that moment my spirit is crushed and like a cowering animal I cry all the way home. My parents comfort me and I ask them:

"Why did that old woman call me a 'nigger' and a Black 'wog', when I was only being kind? What is a 'nigger' and a Black 'wog', anyway?"

My parents don't answer my questions. They are concerned that this white woman might make a false allegation against me. In that moment I learn that my parents are not respected in this England full of white people. I learn that I am a Negro girl. Later, I learn that this means that I will be called other names by other white people, names like 'Blackie', 'Sambo' and 'Gollywog'. As I weep and try to fight back the growing disrespect for myself and my parents, my father says:

"Don't study those people, them fool".

In that moment, I am again reminded of my grandmother and I understand a confusing mixture of things: my father is afraid of white people (power); he doesn't respect them; he is equal to them.

My mother takes my hand and leads me into the kitchen—where my aunties are speaking. These women are going to be my allies. They begin to initiate

me into the ways of white People and what it means to be a Black Clever Girl in Britain:

"Darling, these white people are frighten of us because…"

A Question of Identity

But it was to become even more complicated than that. Within my own community and peer group, I was marginalised because many of my peers had never been to the Caribbean. They had only the British experience and, as a result, had internalised a hatred of their own origins due largely to media stereotypes of the compliant idiot 'nigger', wretched slave or the swollen-bellied starving African. My accent represented all they hated about their own 'Otherness' and they were fearful of my outward expression of the fact that although I didn't understand how to be English, "I wasn't afraid of white people"—and so they distanced themselves from me. At the time, as an outsider both in a foreign country and within my community, I felt isolated and perhaps due to this, I unconsciously developed a fascination with the question of identity.

In the 1970s, second generation West Indian children were institutionally discriminated against. In Primary schools, a disproportionate number of West Indian immigrant children were placed in classes for the 'Educationally Subnormal'. I was one of these children. I was put in an 'ESN' class with white children who had severe learning and physical disabilities, simply because I had a West Indian accent and delayed comprehension of the English language. At local comprehensive schools, they had a streaming system, in which all the Black pupils were placed in average or below average classes. There were a few exceptions, but I was not one of them. The Careers Advice for Black pupils consisted of being given the address for Sainsbury's, a food retailer looking for shelf-fillers or local factories looking for assembly workers. In the 1970s, 80 per cent of black students left school with low-grade CSEs (Certificate of Secondary Education). Shockingly, the statistics have not much improved for Black boys and girls in the 2000s (Rampton 1981; Curtis 2008).

Black History was not recognised or taught in British schools at this time, either. In the 1960s, the trauma and shame attached to the Slave

Trade, (also known as the 'African Holocaust/Maafa') was negatively internalised by some people of African descent (Marimba 1994). It is not uncommon for colonised people to develop internal divisions. Thus, some African and Caribbean people internalised a hatred for each other. Some Africans believed that they were superior to Caribbeans whom they considered 'Slave Babies/workers'. Some Caribbeans in turn believed Africans were uncivilised people who could not protect their own people from slavery. From a place of trauma and taboo, each disassociated from the other. Latterly, however, the combined term 'African-Caribbean' came to represent a symbolic demonstration (if predominantly within 'informed'/academic circles) by both groups of claiming a common pre-slavery history of African origins (Owusu-Kwarteng 2017). 'Colourism', in which light-skinned people are seen as superior, persists throughout the Caribbean, but it is the privilege that whiteness accords that creates the social injustice and associated problems experienced by Black people, regardless of their shade (Yancy 2004). Attributing racial injustice to low self-esteem and a collective Black self-hatred robs Black people of their human agency (Headley 2004, p. 88).

In my teens, I would listen to '*I am a slave*' by the Calypso singer Mighty Sparrow (1963). I connected with the lyrics and would sing along with tears flowing down my face. Calypso is still an act of resistance, a recorded 'Oral history' and commentary of our lived experiences. I listened to the calypso blues with their familiar elongated words, the vibrating trumpet, the pulsating swing and jauntiness, the unyielding tension of unexpressed terror of a bounded people like my ancestors and I understood the line that runs from their experiences to my membership of a people who can still be physically attacked by a white person for simply being Black. I understood that protestations against any form of sleight or racial attack could result in being wrongfully sectioned or imprisoned by a racist system that is hostile towards my community.

And what of class? Growing up in Britain, my parents did not consider us to be working class. In their eyes, the term usually referred to white uneducated people as portrayed on television, or the bigots they were forced to work alongside in the factories. They voted Labour, considered at the time as the working class party, because they acknowledged some commonalities with that class. However, we were never encouraged to

believe that any of the political classes actually cared about the plight of oppressed people, whether Black or white. My parents were to be proved correct when Labour introduced the Immigration Bill in the 1970s, which meant that no more people from the Commonwealth could live or work in Britain. Britain's population was re-classified as comprising either 'Citizens' or 'Subject members'. In order to be a Citizen, your grandparents had to be white and to have been born in Britain. Gilroy's (1987) *There 'Aint no Black in the Union Jack* was testament to the fact that Great Britain (England, Scotland and Ireland) was officially white.

As a young girl aged ten, who is struggling at school in England, I watch my mother get dressed each morning in a formal tailored suit that does not disguise in my eyes her beautiful womanly figure. I love her raised bottom and wish my bottom was like hers instead of being flat, betraying traces of my white heritage. Mother is transformed into an immaculate, articulate, confident Black Professional—in those days a rare sight—who works at Number 10 Downing Street as a Personal Secretary to Labour Ministers. As I look up at her in admiration, she reaches for her large black bag stuffed with important papers, checks that she has everything she needs and then give me a kiss goodbye. Just before pulling the front door behind her, she says:

"Do your best at school".

I aspire to be like my mother. I want to work in a position of importance. Eventually my mother is in a position of seniority as she excels at managing failing administration departments. However, the stresses of the daily micro-aggressions she experiences take a toll on her health.

In the evenings, I watch my father getting dressed for work on night shifts at a Fleet Street newspaper. We are able to read a whole range of magazines and newspapers we otherwise would never have read. My father knows at what point of his journey to and from work he will be flagged over by the police, who after repeatedly questioning him will address him by his first name as they ask him to get out of his car to answer more questions. They will try to provoke him in the hope that he will lose his temper. He knows that if he ever did he would be incarcerated. My father endures this for years. We children have been taught that in order to survive living in England we have to acknowledge those in power; we have to be silent 'when they are talking their shit' although we know differently; we mustn't re-educate them or put ourselves at risk. As Black people we have always had to learn how to survive.

Often when returning to his car after one of these incidents, my father hears the police officers saying to each other, with a grudging respect for him, that they wouldn't be able to put up with the kind of treatment they have just meted out. My father can do so because he doesn't respect them, so they have no psychological power over him. He considers himself above them.

My parents did not aspire to be white middle class because they were sure of themselves. But my status was complex and shifting. I was often the butt of jokes as a young girl at High School. I was considered privileged and not liked because I was one of only two girls from Grenada, a smaller island, whereas they were all from Jamaica, making their status higher than mine. Also, I did not have to rush home from school to take care of younger siblings and prepare dinner. I was considered spoilt like the 'white children' whose privileges 'we' were envious of. Fair-skinned (Red) and not Jamaican, I was marginalised. I had Black and white friends and so was bullied for years by Black girls. On reflection, I would argue these girls needed a place to express their rage against the 'privileged classes' and the domination they were experiencing at home.

Many Black parents asserted their power in the home, communicating expectations of perfection in household chores and demanding their children's obedience and respect, reinforced through physical beatings. For their part, my parents had their views about who and how I should be. They believed that they had made sacrifices in leaving the West Indies to come to England and consequently wanted their children to have a better life. There were great expectations from my parents that I do well at school despite the discrimination. Many parents did not acknowledge the existence of discrimination, preferring to believe that anyone in authority would not abuse their power against a child. If a child did not achieve sufficiently, they believed that it was the fault of the child, who must be lazy for not using the many opportunities in England that they had never had in the West Indies. My parents were not liberal and there came a time, to the amazement of my then friends, that my father asked me to leave the family home. Feeling diminished by receiving no respect from the wider society, my parents demanded it in 'their house'. They believed that I had been disrespectful by challenging their authority in 'their own house' and so at the age of sixteen, I was relegated to the 'good for nothing' class who could be disrespected and abused. Being considered

'womanish' as a child and young adult proved problematic then. Subsequently, it positively influenced my outlook on life, particularly the high valuation I attach to developing 'critical thinking' in myself and others, both in and outside of academia.

Black and Managing

As I write, other 'voices' arising from my history and positioning make themselves heard. They 'remind' me that some may find my reflections of gender, race and class uncomfortable. They suggest that some of my reflections appear to position me as a 'victim'. I purposefully push back against my internalised Eurocentric trained therapist 'voice' which renders the Black person invisible as it accuses and suggests that I 'shut up' or admit that I am suffering from a persecution complex. In order to not fit this familiar category of the 'Black person with a chip on their shoulder' or worse 'a victim', should I simply deny my everyday experiences of gendered racism? And if so, at what cost to my mental and physical health? Even in my professional life, I have had to resist these voices. Despite the findings of The McPherson Report,[1] institutional racism still continues in contexts beyond the police. As a Black woman professional, I have had to negotiate my way through the intertwining strands of racism and sexism at work in several settings.

Working in the Charity sector, what is considered the ground-breaking 'Teen parent project' I designed, developed and managed is visited by the Minister of Health. On meeting the all-Black team members, he praises us for the progress we are making and, speaking directly to me throughout, says:

"If only we could bottle your success!"

Suddenly I hear the white female CEO mumble something that immediately reclaims the project as her property, effectively reminding me and the team that as Black workers we are not equal to the white workers and don't really belong in the Board room. I stand there dazed, like a mother who has

[1] A report of an official enquiry into the police investigation of the murder of a young Black man called Stephen Lawrence, which established the existence of what came to be known as 'institutional racism' within the police force.

had her child snatched from her, like a mother being told she has no right to the child she gave birth to. The Board room comes into sharp relief, with portraits of its lineage of seventeenth-century powdered and wigged white slave owners lining the walls, its heavy dark furniture and draped curtains, its thick carpet demonstrating the wealth from its slavery past. A few months earlier, being interviewed in this room, I had simply read the location as the organisation's version of a posh room—like my parents' front-room at home, decorated with all our best ornaments—a room simply there to impress and entertain. Now, as I stand here, I understand the Board room as the symbolic representation of this organisation's white upper classes, a place where they exercise their power, a place where the wives of husbands who work in the City can lord it over the white middle- and working classes and the Blacks. Despite the success of the project and the positive feedback on its achievements, the all-white senior management team consider my management style 'unorthodox'. I am viewed with suspicion—and envy. I am aware I have hit a very low glass ceiling and any dreams of progression in this tight-knit circle is now closed to me. I have been 'nobbled' and will be pushed out of the domain of the white management classes. I become a Psychotherapy Consultant. I attend numerous public debates and conferences relating to policy development opportunities for young Black women, where I witness these same white women acting as the authority on 'the Black experience'.

A 'therapeutic community' will surely be different. I am a participant at an interdisciplinary conference whose aims are to examine how trauma is carried from one generation to the next and to assess the potential for psychotherapeutic interventions to heal the intergenerational trauma experienced by individuals and communities. What I witness here is only minimal recognition among a predominantly white middle class panel of the impact of the 'Black Holocaust'—the inherited trauma of slavery and colonialism. There is an unexamined Eurocentric outlook which unconsciously marginalises the British Black experience and gags the voices of those concerned, through a kind of 'casualization' of our ongoing trauma—a trauma that manifests in a range of naturalised psycho-social limitations that are structural in origin, including in relation to inequality, social exclusion, direct racial discrimination, discriminatory abuse, poverty, unemployment, insecure housing and compulsory detention. In an otherwise reverential and solemn debate about trauma, a White psychologist speaks as part of her presentation of her

experience of working with a desperate African Caribbean mother in receipt of welfare benefits, who was struggling with her relationship with Social Services. To add a little 'light relief', she makes a humorous comment about the 'failing' of the Social Services in a high-profile case that ended in tragedy. The Black British experience has not featured in the debate so far but the Black client in this well-known case is now 'casually' laughed at and belittled by an esteemed audience of 'caring' professionals. I squirm with discomfort that this White woman's sense of entitlement is so strong that she is unconscious of her own 'otherness' and how, from her position of white privilege, she has shown no respect either for the Black female client or for the Black participants attending the conference.

Later, with no sense of irony 'we' are reminded by another white panellist that we should be mindful of a 'conspiracy of silence' around 'race' and that as professionals we are part of this conspiracy if we do not challenge our own attitudes and those of others. I feel burdened by the conflict between challenging their unconsciously colonialist position and once more putting myself and my community in the familiar position of being the 'problem' that will just not 'go away'.

The ten Black participants at the conference, including myself, went on to form a sub-group where we discussed our experiences as Black psychotherapists and how this conference as a microcosm of society, had mirrored many of the issues of alienation and psychological oppression endured by our Black clients. As participants, we had witnessed the one Black panellist being what can only be described as attacked and rubbished by her fellow clinical professionals, who claimed, for example, that Black issues are no longer relevant since they have been subsumed into the generalised 'Black and Minority Ethnic' (BAME) category. Visibly shaken by the verbal assault, she had slipped on the stairs as she left the stage, in an example of what Jungians would see as a physical manifestation of having been metaphorically knocked off her feet. Later, she reflected on her experience in writing—reflections that echoed mine as a participant:

> I am always afraid that I will be attacked rather than supported when I am in the minority and although I know this is not always true, my trauma speaks … writing this paper has been a way of debriefing after being on a

> panel at the end of the conference day, where I experienced my own alienation, gagging and being silenced by the white voices surrounding me. Sitting in-between four white people behind a white table cloth attempting to respond to comments and questions that related to my theme was a traumatic experience. Most of the 10 brown skinned delegates who had been there earlier had left the auditorium. (McKenzie-Mavinga 2009)

She struck a more affirming note in concluding her reflections:

> I also have great hopes that each vibrant response offers us all an opportunity to process the trauma attached to Black issues.

After the conference, I felt disappointment rather than outrage that after decades, we as a people were still on the fringes of decision-making in every political aspect of our lives. However, instead of shame, I now had a sense of pride—we had all contributed to the debate and through this, had made ourselves visible. We had revealed other ways of knowing that challenge normative discourses. But there is a long way to go and the risks of silence/silencing within processes of professional knowledge construction remain.

Silence

The presenter at this Professional Knowledge workshop is a white male. He asks each of us to state our research topic and share what we know about our subjects. As each participant talks and the presenter comments, we all listen and feel encouraged by each other. There is a sense of comradeship and a respect for what each person is trying to achieve. But I still relate particularly to one participant's topic—shame. I am aware that I have already internalised the symptoms of the 'wretched Black woman'. I experience the physical sensations of shame as I prepare to present what I know of my subject to a group comprised of predominately white middle class women. (The two men there stand out, as does the other Black woman). I struggle with the desire to remain silent for fear of being ignored, but I share what I know of my subject: 'African Caribbean women and trauma'. It feels to me as though the air has

been sucked out of the room to be replaced by an oppressive silence. You can hear a pin drop. I have come to expect the 'silence'. But here—within this group of therapists—I had believed we were willing to endure the psychological and intellectual demands of each other's subjects. I had hoped we would be able to bring at least the same professional empathy we offer our clients to these experiences of African Caribbean Women. It seems to me, however, that even for this group, the African Caribbean woman unconsciously represents the age-old 'Black problem', the 'unclassed', the 'ugly baby'. I feel like someone who has come along and spoilt their party.

There is a long pause. Out of the silence, without any acknowledgment of my presentation from anyone, a white female participant starts to present. I am in a double bind. I am faced with taking responsibility for interrupting this person mid-sentence by asking for the same feedback others have received, from a reluctant group, or remaining silent yet again. Through being at the receiving end of the 'silence' in the past I have been left feeling traumatised, ignored, gagged and enraged at being unable to fully express intellectually what I had experienced—and also with a nagging feeling that it was my own fault for needing to be acknowledged and affirmed by a white community that dehumanises me. Motivated by shame and wanting to quickly integrate back into the group, I have previously colluded with the silencing, even initiating changing the subject, so entrenched has my internalised oppression become. Now, I am obliged to personify the 'angry Black woman' by choosing to speak. I speak. Required to give feedback, the presenter acknowledges the over-representation of African Caribbean people in the Mental Health Services. He also acknowledges that he knows nothing of my subject area.

I am reminded that the experiences of African Caribbean people in general and African Caribbean women in particular, take white professionals and practitioner-participants to a place of 'unknowing'. In such a context, it would not be surprising if the previously unexamined and now unwanted feelings of rage arising in white participants from this uncomfortable place were projected onto Black participants. Often in these situations, I find myself struggling not to manifest feelings of rage, resulting from the overwhelming emotions arising from having been ignored, shut down and shamed. This time I force myself to stay in an environment where I am feeling vulnerable and physically sick.

Witnessing Silencing

I am able to recall and articulate the above event so clearly because afterwards I asked the other Black woman in the group if she would be a critical friend and record both her own reactions to my subject and her observations of the groups' reaction. I wanted to be sure that *I* was not projecting *my* negative experience onto the group. I needed a witness. This is what she witnessed and how she interpreted her observations:

> I can try to put into words the experience of hearing/watching you talk about your project a few days ago. The first and most striking thing was the silence which met your articulate account of what your project looks to explore. It was very strange to hear your voice so clear and certain and then to observe the silence … my thoughts were that the group immediately reflected the silence that is happening in the wider community and that we all were given an experience of that by the group. It was hard for me to find my voice to break the silence as I was so shocked and appalled by it and of course had my own association to that to deal with. I think perhaps you are dealing with something that stirs up a sense of its being unspeakable. There was a feeling of grubbiness in the air and then a feeling that you had transgressed or messed with the feelings of the group. Finally, I feel there was a defensive mood, even as people tried to respond to your topic. I could also feel your fury and it felt very justified. Finally, I can't help but notice that some people took up quite a lot of time and space in the room, but your opportunity to speak was dispatched quite rapidly. So I think we know from this that there is something unbearable in the work and you will need to access your resilience and make use of all the support you can get to navigate this. I felt a feeling of solidarity with you and I felt quite angry—it was too familiar. All the more reason to forge ahead with this vital work! (Personal communication)

Class Betrayal: "You think you nice… You think you white"

Trauma… pain… injury. Sennett and Cobb (1972) refer to the 'hidden injuries' of class. The 'Black community' is often 'lumped in' with 'the working classes' but it is also stratified in class terms. So—I am from both a working and a middle class background. I have experienced the prejudices that come from being assigned to one class and excluded from another. As a result, I reject the reductive notion, adopted by some, that being Black means you are 'classless' and I also challenge the naive belief that to be middle class and Black means you are trying to be white.

I use both 'Black' and 'middle class' in relation to myself as political terms. Being both Black and middle class in a Britain that does not recognise a Black middle class is dislocating and restrictive for those who are. From talking about what it means to be middle class with other middle class Black women, both in the wider society and in our community, I discover that we share similar societal experiences of racist exclusions of us as Black professionals as well as exclusion within our own community from groups that have internalised the narrow definition of what it means to be Black (and therefore 'classless') in Britain. We are not often accused outright of betraying what is considered to be a 'real' Black person in Britain (even as I reflect on this, I hear a judging voice saying "Well, if you were really Black, you wouldn't be writing this"), but there is nevertheless yet another imperative to silence in that position. Sharing negative experiences of exclusion *within* the Black community immediately signifies, for those who speak with that accusatory voice that I am aspiring to be white. If I am middle class and am prepared to expose the taboos of the community, I *must* be aspiring to be white. I am seen as a privileged woman who has adopted the dominant white cultural perspective to look down at the 'declassed' Black person. And so I in my turn must be 'taken down':

"You think you nice! You think you white!"

And so I move through the world, tangled in the interwoven strands of my own classed, gendered and racialised embodiment—as a girl who moved from living with her grandmother in Grenada, where for a while

she didn't know she had a 'colour', to become a professional Black woman in a Britain where racist practices within both the wider society and her own community position her as irretrievably 'in-between'. A professional woman who has travelled from the SEN class to undertake a PhD. Does that make me a 'clever girl'? Sure. But more than that. What it has made me is a Womanish woman, traditionally universalist, purple rather than lavender.

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8

"I stand with them" … United and Secure

Melanie Reynolds

Hanging Out the Washing

Hanging out the washing as I have done today has strong academic resonances for me … It places me back in Yorkshire in 1999. It is a happy reminder of 'pegging out' the day I heard my teenage daughter calling out of the window to me excitedly.

"It's come, Mum—your letter! It's come!"

The letter is from Ruskin College, Oxford. It is to let me know whether I have been accepted onto their history course as a result of an interview two months ago …

With all the washing hung out and dancing merrily on the line, I walk steadily back into the house. Opening the letter will be a tricky business. It contains my future….

This day will live on in my memory.

The girl from Yorkshire is in…

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"Dear Melanie, we are pleased to offer you a place at Ruskin College, Oxford to study History."

Well …

Academia ….

Not a usual trajectory for a working-class woman from West Yorkshire with a few low-grade school exam results and a teenage daughter herself at university. My need to study was compelling and scary in equal measure. As was the place. Oxford seemed a world away and to even contemplate studying at one of its colleges was anathema with my meagre qualifications. This would be the main obstacle—or so I thought.

On My Way

It's September and I'm at the Leeds train station waiting to travel to Oxford. On my way down, I am a little worried about what the next few years will bring, but nonetheless I am full of optimism. I am a gregarious girl and have worked since leaving school at what my dad calls 'The University of Life'. With that experience and a tongue in my head I think I am going to be able to straddle my old and my brave new worlds … With my holdall stuffed to the brim and my northern working-class accent deeply rooted, I walk with excitement and trepidation towards the doors of Ruskin College. I am unaware of the twists and turns and to come.

Dress and Accent

Northern girls are famed for their fashion sense. And first appearances are important … or so I had been told. If I was going to struggle in the classroom, I felt that outside of it I could hide my lack of education by wearing fashionable clothes. I didn't know that this would tie me even more strongly to the membership of what was considered the 'northern uneducated working-class camp'. Oxford's student body is predominantly white and middle class (Reynolds 2018b; Sutton Trust 2008); working-class fashion 'rules' evidently didn't apply. Looking around while listening to debates in the Oxford Union, I saw that in order to fit into this southern

'elite' university city, there were three dress options: couture, 'charity shop vintage' or jeans. Furthermore, I may as well have left my make-up bag at home—Clever Girls here evidently had no time to apply make-up. Or rather, as I was fascinated to learn later, they debated whether to wear mascara or not, agonising over what kind of message it might give to men. So I got this new make-up culture under my belt and, since couture was way beyond my purse, opted for jeans. That just left the accent. The further south the train had carried me the softer and posher—and different to mine—the accents were: an unfamiliar chorus that was such a contrast with what I was used to. My broad Yorkshire accent attracted attention and left me exposed. It was mimicked back to me by others when I spoke, when all I wanted to do was blend in.

The Stranglehold on My Voice

I felt the sound of it linked me strongly to a supposedly uneducated female working-class world. I felt vulnerable and insecure in the south. 'The North' has deeply rooted stereotypes arising from negative media representations and TV programmes such as *Coronation Street* and I was often asked where my flat cap and whippet were. I am tied, through the past and present, to a strong industrial patriarchal culture in which women are largely victims in life and who play their secondary matriarchal and maternal role … sometimes rather badly, according to these stereotypical portrayals. In this 'University of Life' culture, 'book learning' isn't as highly valued. I was raised in this culture. I cleaned, and stacked shelves, and pulled pints in a pub to keep the wolf from the door while my daughter was young. Her care was what was of upmost importance in my mind. I didn't want a full-time job that meant someone else cared for her. I wanted to do it myself. I hadn't acquired middle-class versions of economic or cultural capital. At weekends as a teenager and a young mother, my parents encouraged me to go along with them to support the local rugby team where my brother played. I learned to shout encouragement to him and the 'lads' from the side-lines and went to the pub afterwards, drinking until the late hours. Hardly, a recipe for developing a knowledge of 'the Arts' or entry into higher education and its

ways of talking. I could talk about rugby and motherhood but little else and I soon learned that there were few students—and definitely no academics—like me. I began to suspect that few northern working-class students progressed to academic success. Certainly there were few who were willing to admit to such a class background—the ones who were said they felt riven by it and, as I was later to learn, had gone so far as to refine, change and eventually hide this aspect of their lives and with it a regional accent (except when it reappeared in moments of anger), seen to denote working-class status, in order to fit in with a middle-class academic culture. This spoke volumes to me about how unwelcome a northern accent was, how inappropriate it was judged in middle-class academic circles. It came as no surprise to me later when I learned that universities don't attract working-class students in accordance with their abilities, despite a slew of think-tank proposals on how to do so. Before then, though, I had to cope with my own demons.

Doubt and Failure

A realisation of the implications of my strong working-class identity punched me slow and hard over the first three months at Oxford. I felt such an outsider. I had so very much to learn, in both an academic and a cultural sense. I hadn't banked on having the added pressure of having to conform to something that was alien to me—to display middle-class values while I studied. This silent curriculum requirement sat heavily on my shoulders. What to do? I had gone precisely to learn and I thought I should get on with it and do the best I could with what I had and who I was, so I applied myself. Perhaps the hard edges of my accent would be 'knocked off' by spending time in the south? But I was conflicted about this because my accent was 'me'. And yet it and I didn't fit. Seeking to do well—or the best I could—academically, meant locking myself away in my room for days on end to write my essays. But without a single 'A-level' to my name[1] and no middle-class cultural capital to draw on, I fumbled and struggled to understand the structure of a good essay.

[1] Ruskin College offers university-standard education to adult learners, without the need for qualifications.

My reading habits had been declared 'wide' and 'ambitious' by my teachers, so the requisite reading came easily. But I found it difficult to construct a cohesive clear argument and after receiving the lowest marks in the class for the first exam, I was metaphorically heading back home. Trying to swim in a sea void of all that was 'normal' to me was virtually impossible. I felt inadequate, unimportant and unaccepted. "Not for the likes of me" resonated loudly for this working-class mum. I felt nothing I knew, felt or had lived fitted in with this southern academic culture. Where were other working-class students? Where were any signs of northern identity, either in relation to language or culture? How would I form strong academic relationships with these lecturers in order to aid my development and allow my knowledge to grow? I was gripped by fear. Sitting alone in my room, I became enveloped by feelings of vulnerability, doubt and failure. I felt I had none of the attributes required to succeed in Oxford. Just in time, support came from two wonderful female lecturers—one at Ruskin College and another when I moved on to the 'big school' of another university, who saw my promise, reassured me that I was capable of succeeding and told me that if I stuck at it, it would 'come'.

Picking Myself Up

Their faith in me brought a slow realisation that my 'lack' (of a southern identity), my Northern accent and my working-class culture may not actually have any bearing on my academic ability. It wasn't axiomatic that intellectual capability and a working-class northern identity were incompatible! Having been all at sea, this realisation set in motion a raft of new, more positive emotions, prompting me to question whether anything about who I am should allow me to believe that academic performance might elude me. Could I 'right' such misconceptions? Could I 'escape' the constraining power of such internalised beliefs? It would mean that I would have to be accepted as I was because I could no longer consider changing my accent or my commitment to my culture. In any case, I didn't have the wherewithal to do so as I was giving my all to my studies. So I listened to these women's wise words and decided it was worth another term. I put the first term's failure of 1999 behind me. I walked

tentatively to the first session of the second term at Ruskin to study 'Feminist and Radical Histories'. Now *that* struck a chord with me! Having followed the stereotypical route of a working-class woman into wifedom and motherhood, I lapped up these sessions and seminars. I walked out of classes with the lecturer's words ringing in my ears as she outlined the possible paths women had been able to follow other than the 'normal' prescribed trajectory. It didn't always have to be marriage and we didn't have to do all the housework! A stranger to drugs, I felt high. This topic was crucially important. This lecturer should be made available on the NHS! I greedily swallowed her vital medicine down. When feminists and members of the Women's Liberation Movement had appeared on television in the 1970s, my dad had characterised them as a bra-burning and tub-thumping lot. Now I was being introduced to Sheila Rowbotham (1973) and Germaine Greer (1970) who theorised the misogynistic processes and practices that could have such a negative impact on the family. This feminist canon provided women with resources for activism. 'Strident' women at their collective best, rejecting stereotypes of motherhood and resisting identities of victimhood.

I read with gusto. As a wife and mother, I felt feminism was opening the door on my 'closed' mind. The images of strident women who flouted tradition and struck out against the patriarchal system were hugely empowering. Women could shape their own destiny. Studying history revealed these feminist pioneers and I read widely from the publications that filled my reading lists, about high-profile campaigns like 'Votes for Women' and radical, socialist and feminist movements featuring nineteenth century Women's Trade Unionism. Here were female activists full of bravado showing that women could make a difference. I was proud of these historical figures, these revolutionary women. I was also introduced to the work of the 'new' women who had entered university since the 1970s, often the first in their families, who set about writing women back 'in' to the picture—a picture that had been composed by men and which had rendered them invisible.

Their courage and determination filled me with joy and writing about them won me the history prize at Ruskin College that year (Reynolds 2000). My education continued when I moved into the history department at my next university—but in a different way. Here I encountered a strong cohort of southern middle-class history lecturers who didn't

want to teach women's rights, radicalism and feminism. Some (male and female) lecturers had abandoned the early revolutionary female radicals and feminists, claiming that 'Women's History' had been 'done'. It was being scrapped. They felt that it was important to focus on other areas of women's lives, on other kinds of women, such as those affected by the nineteenth century Poor Law (e.g. King 2000) and female criminals who killed their babies in order to escape the shame of illegitimacy, free themselves from unwanted relationships and keep their jobs as servants (Kilday 2007, 2013). More scholarship-revealed stories of the women who were victims of domestic violence both at home and at work (Rose 1992; Clark 1995).

Here was a curriculum that gave me and my female working-class ancestors another place in history. I felt that this was such a laudable project: it added to the feminist histories learned at Ruskin in relation to my female ancestors—and to my understanding of how history itself is constructed. It was not only intellectually enlightening but personally nourishing—it gave me succour to know not only what working-class women 'did' but what they were subjected 'to'. So much so that when asked to teach it myself I responded positively and proudly. And yet, I had no experience of teaching. My parents had not had an academic education. Standing at the front of a classroom to deliver a lecture and run a seminar filled me with horror. All the old worries about how I would be perceived as a northerner re-surfaced. The only time I'd made my voice heard in a public arena was when shouting at the ref. and players on the rugby touchline. And now here I was being asked to teach—and as a requirement of my PhD Scholarship, so I didn't have any choice. But I was still petrified. The day of my first lecture and seminar came far too quickly.

Teaching Women's History

As I walk up the hill to teach at 'the big school' in 2005, feelings of sickness and nausea envelop me. I feel as though my legs won't carry me there. My partner and I live in a student area, so although they don't know it, I am walking alongside the students whom I am about to teach. As I hear their deep self-assured voices, I once again feel so very different

and I immediately suffer 'imposter syndrome'. I look at their dress. They are 'elegantly slumming it'. The cost of housing here means that my partner and I have lived in one room for ten years, where I feed us by cooking daily on a 'belling' hob. My PhD scholarship may fund living in one room in this expensive city of Oxford but it doesn't stretch to a new wardrobe so I am wearing the same old jeans and jumper. The same soft chorus I had heard on the train echoes around me. I hear the musings of these aspirant young middle-class students as a working-class mum from Yorkshire. There is such a gulf between us. At their age I wasn't walking up to University. I had left school at fifteen with few qualifications. I had begun full-time work and soon after gave birth to my daughter. Yet here I am walking up the hill to teach them.

We discuss the prostitutes who became victims of Jack the Ripper. We discuss infanticidal mothers. I teach medical and poor law history from King (ibid), documenting the lives of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century women who have needed to seek help from the welfare state—deserted and married women, widows and single mothers, driven to plead their case for assistance to the vestry. I cite texts, in a token airing of women's politics that establish the middle-class nature and membership of the Votes for Women movement, with no mention of any working-class women's involvement. *Their* 'contribution' to society is represented by their 'feckless' child care methods, which ostensibly put nineteenth and twentieth century populations at risk and purportedly led eventually to a crisis in the health of soldiers fighting in the Crimea and two World Wars. Here are nineteenth century industrial mothers betraying their mothering instinct by placing their babes into others' arms—others who were often incapable of delivering good care.

Students in high numbers eagerly devour this subject matter and my teaching skills are recognised and applauded but after years of teaching this curriculum and determining its historical importance, I realise that while it outlines their neediness, it is mostly the failures of working-class women that are being promoted. I seemed to be confirming every available stereotype of working-class women perpetrated by the media. I feel I am teaching to the converted and there is little to show the few working-class students in the group that they or their ancestors have made a positive contribution to society and that in the historical parenting stakes it is only the 'middling sort' who shine. In texts such as Bailey

(2012), for example, there is scant mention of any working-class mother's positive parenting. More generally too, working-class mothers are cast as villains, blamed for the high infant mortality rate and become an easy target for middle-class observers and 'medics' to condemn (e.g. Ikin 1865). Even Charles Dickens (himself a middle-class observer, of course) was perplexed as to what working-class mums did with their children when they went to work: "What do they do with the infants of the mothers who work in the mills?" he asked the Reverend J. Elder Canning. "Oh", the Rector replied, "they bring them to me, and I take care of them in the churchyard" (Dickens 1874, p. 723). Florence Nightingale, too, lamented the lack of intelligence and skill of the working-class nurses who were responsible for the infants in the workhouses. According to her, they were "too old, too weak, too drunken, too dirty, too stolid, or too bad to do anything else" (Abel-Smith 1979, p. 12). Florence's colleague Louisa Twining concurred, suggesting that "pauper nurses were not up to the task of caring for the infants, as they had little experience and exposed [them] to significant risk." (Twining 1892); while Frances Power Cobbe, the well-known feminist activist, referred to the working-class women who looked after the children in the workhouse as the most "wretched" specimens (Abel-Smith 1979, p. 12). Medical doctor Robert Baker was still focussing on 'industrial mothers' in 1875, when he reported that not only did infants and children suffer from maternal neglect but that their mothers met their babies' powerful appetites by feeding them a dangerous artificial concoction of milk, bread and sugar known as 'pap' (Baker, quoted in Parliamentary Papers 1872, 1876). The characterisation of working-class mothers as blame-worthy and the employment of them as highly problematic received endorsement at the highest level when Prime Minister Asquith commented on it in the British Medical Journal, observing that "one of the melancholy features of our vital statistics" on the high Infant Mortality Rate was "the employment of married women in factories" (Asquith 1894). It is an attribution of blame that persisted into the twentieth century. Hewitt's (1958) analysis of the high infant mortality rate in the nineteenth century suggested that women who worked in agriculture and industry abandoned their children at home or delegated their child care to siblings leading to injury and even death for infants. (Hewitt 1958, p. 133) and that "The great damage and loss of [infant] life [is] caused by the employment of suckling women as they are now

employed in factories" (p. 103). Without any evidence of a countervailing voice from working-class women themselves, Alice Reid and Robert Woods are able to 'remind' us as recently as 2006 that working-class women have traditionally had little knowledge of a correct infant diet and "had to be taught to breast feed" (Reid 2006; Woods 2006).

I felt that University was about challenging stereotypes, not confirming them. But delivering this curriculum to a mainly middle-class student body raised fears that links could be made between my ancestral past, my recent past and my present. Were these fears founded? Certainly my sense of insecurity and feelings of inadequacy were compounded when, despite my teaching being acclaimed, I overheard one student's middle-class drawl: "I don't think she should be teaching here…speaking like that." So teaching this curriculum wasn't easy when I felt my own history had nothing positive to offer. Nevertheless, over the following years, my professional practice in teaching and research continued to be assessed as of a high calibre. I found sources that had eluded my professors and they encouraged and inspired me to persist by commenting that I knew more about their subjects than they did. What I was being asked to find still failed to counter the stereotypes, however. I still felt culturally and economically set apart from both middle-class academics and students. My identity as a 'wallflower of history' still reigned. I knew I wasn't prepared to—indeed, couldn't —change myself. But could I offer a more balanced historical view of these nineteenth century working-class women which would also serve to build a more secure foundation for my own academic identity? Surely my ancestors were *more* than victims, criminals and non-participants in politics? Middle-class women had gone unchallenged in both the parenting and activism stakes. Could I change that?

The Foundations of an Authentic Working-Class Academic Identity Are Laid

Over time, after delivering the full gamut of modules, I had learned my methods well. As my supportive teachers had predicted, I had acquired research and teaching skills which improved my confidence and brought

a growing conviction that my class identity was not only compatible with but also an essential component of my being a 'clever girl'. The research I had done on behalf of more senior colleagues had produced a rich stock of 'data' in respect of middle-class activism on the one hand and working-class victimhood and criminality on the other and the idea of a book was mooted. But I wasn't happy to continue in this vein. My desire was to find a historical narrative that featured positive voices of working-class activism. The disconnect I had felt with the middle-class academic and student body whose lives never intertwined with mine now became something with potential to generate a more positive outcome. The separation I felt from these contemporaries could become the key to unlock a new phase of research. Being working-class and an outsider would give me a way in to historical scholarship based on elusive working-class source material.

It was often argued that middle-class source material was much easier to find than that of the labouring classes, based on the idea that nineteenth century working-class women had little time to write because of their family and maternal responsibilities. So it would be sources relating to their labour that would provide the 'way in' for me. My earlier reading had led me to believe that working-class women had different goals to middle-class women. The latter sought the vote to be on a political par with their middle-class husbands; since working-class men were not franchised, it would have been thoroughly out of context for their wives to lobby for it. In any case, work consumed the working-class woman's day and night, leaving little time to devote to campaigns. The difficulties they faced were enshrined in the factory acts, which effectively accused them of taking jobs from their husbands, reduced their hours and pay accordingly, discussed the lack of clothes they wore at work and undertook surveys into how they cared for their children when there. The purpose of this 'surveillance' was to send women back into the home but in practice their wage was needed since families could not survive on husbands' wages alone. For working-class women, it was these issues rather than the vote that merited a fight. I suspected that arguments for better rights and conditions at work formed the focus of *their* political activism. And so it was to these sources that I turned.

The Radcliffe Camera

The Radcliffe Camera[2] held an abundance of relevant materials but they had been used previously to discredit working-class women. With my trusty bike chained up outside 'The Camera' I walked into the library and down the steps to the Parliamentary Paper section, keenly aware of the biases that the sources would contain. The lower the steps took me, the higher the trepidation and excitement rose. Would I find what had escaped others or would I find confirmation that working-class women *were* mere wallflowers of history?

It always happened like this … or at least this is always how I recall it: walking down the steps, I imagined the voices held in the documents talking to me. Clamouring for attention in this part of the Bodleian Library that holds thousands and thousands of witnesses giving evidence at parliamentary sessions—telling their stories. Sifting through them was bound to be difficult for someone as prone as I was as a novice historian to getting waylaid by my thirst for knowledge. Thank goodness for Hannah, who worked in the Parliamentary Paper section. She became a friend, (a friendship forged initially in relation to my accent, which, coming from Leeds herself, she recognised). She helped me to focus. I came to the relevant catalogues. In here, Commissioners and Inspectors of Factories reported on the amount of labour working-class women did. But in here, too, were the women's own voices. My heart was pounding as I read them telling me:

> The vote is important, but what is more important to us is our work and this is what we fight for. Our wages support our families and contributes to the overall 'general stock' but we have faced much discrimination to our hours of work, and dress at work. Labouring under these conditions is difficult as we have to continually defend ourselves but our words are not printed. We are aspirational women and want to do the best for our families but we dislike the factory acts, they have done little for us, as we would rather work than our families go hungry. We have a majority [of women] against the factory acts, [and the shorter hours mean] we lose 14d per week and that [kept] me in bread. (Parliamentary paper 1876)

[2] The Radcliffe Camera (Camera, meaning 'room' in Latin; colloquially, 'Rad Cam' or 'The Camera') is part of Oxford University and houses the Radcliffe Science Library.

These were aspirational women, arguing for their work and wage in Parliament and lobbying for less intervention with the factory acts. Furthermore, they did not palm off their children into someone else's arms whilst they worked (Parliamentary paper 1876, cited in Reynolds 2016, 2018a p. 91.) They defended themselves against accusations of being 'bad mothers':

> Yes, I go to work and I like it but I do not abandon my kids for I take them with me. It is my duty to do so and when I get there, I put them in a basket … ('Mother A 26', cited in Hutchins 1983, p. 150)

> I can combine my work with child care … it is legal to take [my] little ones along with [me]. (Parliamentary paper 1876, cited in Reynolds 2016, p. 94)

> I dictate my own hours. I go in at 8 instead of 6 because it suits me and my family; I breast feed at work. (Mothers 35 and 105, cited in Llewellyn 1978)

> I combine this with my work. It is better than being at home because if you work at home such as making match boxes you are continually picking your baby up and putting the boxes down, whereas I can watch my loom carrying my baby. My loom doesn't stop if I pick my baby up. This is how we survive and is vital to our economy. (Elkin 1983, p. 169)

They were keen to demonstrate their strong motherly instinct and were very cautious who they put their kids with. Being 'well dressed cleanly people' themselves, they didn't trust those who didn't come up to the mark and were quite capable of challenging both 'professionals' and employers:

> We know better than the medical doctors who suggested we put them in a place that was riddled with vermin. (Parliamentary Paper Protection of Infant Life 1871–2, cited in Reynolds 2016, p. 152)

> Our children get gastroenteritis diseases but this is because we have to clean the factory privys out. The employers will not invest in the new sanitary sewage system and we wash our hands afterwards but the excrement can get on our clothes. (Parliamentary Papers 1876 and 1893–4 cited in Reynolds 2016, p. 101)

Combining waged work with child care was not confined to factory mothers. A huge raft of 'industrial mothers' did the same: female salt miners and chain makers made slings to rock their babies to sleep while they worked and agricultural women who worked in the fields took theirs along with them too, carrying them to work in a basket and asking the older children to watch over them. Medical doctors exonerated workhouse nurses who had been labelled as ignorant, lazy and drunks:

> Parish or union nurses demonstrate the best side of parish nursing ··· they seem on the whole well-conducted, zealous and well managed… and anxious to deserve good opinion. (*The Lancet* 1865 p. 134 cited in Reynolds 2016, p. 111)

The medical journal *The Lancet* confirmed that these women were "very intelligent" and "active" (*The Lancet* 1865, p. 134 cited in Reynolds 2016, p. 111) and even Florence Nightingale said that some of the nurses were "the best type of women, clever, dutiful, cheerful and caring, [and] endowed above all with the motherliness of nature which is the most precious attribute of a nurse" (Abel-Smith 1979, p. 5 cited in Reynolds 2016, p. 111). Drink was taken by these nurses but they were able to justify this: "Yes, we drink, but this is on the advice of the doctors who say it will help to mask the smell when laying out the dead" (Smith 1867, pp. 192–3 and Orme Dudfield 1879, p. 6 cited in Reynolds 2016, p. 110). Mitigating circumstances were also offered in relation to their supposed lack of dietary knowledge (giving their babies sugar was on the advice of the medical doctors).

I was heartened, encouraged and excited to be unearthing the words of these working-class women, to see them here, displaying control over their working arena and hours, dictating them through discussions with their employers. *This* is where both the interests and the power of the nineteenth century working-class women revealed itself, providing new foundational knowledge about a world in which women had to contribute to family finances by combining waged work and child care, but where they also had some agency. To see the level of control these women had over their lives injected a huge sense of pride into this fledgling academic; and they had lived not a mile away from where I had lived in

Yorkshire to boot. Further evidence of their confidence and intelligence and their place at the forefront of a politics of work-based rights was to be found in The Huddersfield Library. Here are testimonies to working-class women's political activism in 1875, successfully fighting a ten per cent cut to weaver's wages, long before middle-class women were engaged in fighting for the vote (Reynolds 2006, 2017).

Included in the agonising detail of the testimonies of these successful nineteenth century female working-class trade unionists is a warning of the challenges middle-class feminists posed to them and to those who came after (women like me). At the time of the Weavers Strike that I catalogued, a power-loom weaver called Ann Ellis reported that middle-class feminists didn't think her and her weavers' committee were capable of winning the war on the wage-cut themselves, and that they offered to 'help' by moving in on the strike. We will never know whether this was because, as with 'workers' today, the weavers were seen to lack the requisite economic and cultural capital, but on her own and her colleagues' behalf, Ann soon put this suspicion to bed, informing them: "We are numerate and intelligent enough to do it ourselves, thank you" (cited in Reynolds 2006, p. 194). She voiced her determination in a speech on the green to an 'army' of 9000 women and men workers—as reported in the local press, which recounted that:

> She had never stood on a platform as she did at present until this strike…. She would bundle up and go, rather than give in to the masters. If they went in at the reduction, the rising generation would have to suffer, and she did not want another strike but wanted this to do and so not have two…the women had begun the battle and would have to get on with it…. (*Dewsbury News*, 16 February 1875)

In the book I *did* write (as opposed to the one I had originally been steered towards), and in my subsequent work, the anger I felt when I realised how hard-won and significant working-class women's political achievements were, how 'hidden from history' they had been and how important for labour history they are, is apparent. Their model of New Unionism was the pioneer for later trade unionist activism, including on behalf of the Match Girls and the London Dockers and they constitute

brightly shining resources to show today's working-class students and present-day activists the way. We are missing so much if the fire of the Match Girls' activism is the only resource we have to draw on.

I may have delighted my colleagues by finding even more supporting material for a narrative of working-class women as downtrodden victims, non-political participants and criminals, but it was these alternative and proactive testimonies, reported in the *Dewsbury News* and the *Huddersfield Examiner*, and found by looking at *class* rather than feminism and gender, that provided the important and *new* stories about working-class women's political activism that formed the basis of the book I chose to write. These revelations of agency and activism engendered a feeling of pride, value and confidence in the working-class girl reading them—a feeling that the working-class woman's past *had* merit. This knowledge helped me to grow in stature and a keen sense of responsibility stiffened my backbone as I walked back up the stairs and out of the library. At last, as a working-class woman and mother, I had something positive to tell and I would relay it with vim and vigour. I sensed my ancestors' wit and 'cleverness' alongside me.

So Here We Stand, Side by Side…

These nineteenth century working-class women taught me that I have an intelligent and revolutionary working-class past. I have female pioneers to identify with. All of 'us' found it important to hold on to our class identity and to organise and undertake activism from *within* our class membership. Ann was determined not to be a 'ragged trousered philanthropist' in bending to the wind in respect of middle-class feminism and activism and I was too, although it took me a lot longer to 'cotton on'. I felt very moved by their stories and their fight. I stand with them, finally, in understanding that you don't have to have middle-class privilege or cultural or economic capital to be intelligent and to campaign for your rights. I saw that before the establishment of feminism as an ideology or a movement, working-class women with families and domestic responsibilities were good mothers and won worker's rights through their own efforts and they put their achievements to use magnificently. As Lewenhak

(1977, p. 84) observes, it is the working-class fixity of purpose that accounts for trades union success. Rather than needing to slough off my roots, I now feel honoured to come from such an innovative, revolutionary and intelligent past; more, it gives me an enormous sense of academic empowerment. But I also realise that the work of revealing working-class pioneers is a bigger job than I first anticipated. Although I received support from some quarters in my earlier academic career and have contributed to media debates about waged working-class mothers,[3] I find the history department has neither appetite nor space in the curriculum for a book that challenges historical accounts of female stereotypes and it has not appointed me to a permanent academic position. With hindsight, I feel that this is appropriate. I wouldn't be happy to stay forever in a place where neither I nor my topic fits comfortably. I can no longer tell stories that exclusively privilege the heroic middle-class female and champion only *her* parenting skills; nor can I portray the working-class victim or criminal at the expense of a dynamic and spirited working-class past and present.

So here I am, sitting on a park bench next to Ann Ellis, *the* famous nineteenth century northern female working-class activist—and I know I am in the right company. This is who I am. I have grown into a confident, inspired—inspirational even!—secure working-class academic of working-class history.

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9

Things You Wouldn't Say to Your Daughter

Panya Banjoko

The Beginning

With one soul
tucked in its red bill
the doctor bird
flies backwards
in-between
the spirit world,
it winds a path
lands here
and hums
as she stoops
in a corner
of a sterile ward
swollen like a gourd,
one spring afternoon
in the throes of May
before 668 full moons

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reared, half a century
after the boats sailed
to a land
where God exists
to save the queen
from scores
who arrived
with their backs
to the sun, to a place
cloaked in contempt
a pen in its top pocket,
to write a history,
that will render
the newcomers criminals.
Hands grey
with guile
fed the land
a story
of how to slice
and gut hope,
how to turn a call
for help
into fear of shame.
She pushed
to the beat
of ragged breath,
the timbre
of legs quivering,
nostrils filled
with how dare you?
This place,
on that day,
was the birth of
me.

On the twenty-first day of May at approximately 3.30 pm, I was born in Nottingham's City Hospital. My mother had arrived in the City in 1962 when the government had not yet restricted access to people from

the former colonies. She came to a land famed for streets paved with gold. I, the product of her dream for a 'better life' in the 'mother country', was born of that Windrush pioneer three years later. I am one of many born to Britain during what is now known as the Windrush generation. One of the many Enoch Powell would predict a threat to the English people of this country. He would espouse 'a Tory nationalist strategy that aimed to safeguard parliamentary sovereignty and national identity from the perceived threats posed by immigration' (Lynch and Mark Garnett 2003, p. 10). Unaware of this, I had my mother's desire to do well cloaking me, her promise that I would own and wear shoes, unlike her whose feet were scarred with the gravel of her home in Jamaica. I am her dream of becoming a professional, her hope of being better. I am all the things she wanted but never had, the one in seven whose birth she experienced alone.

I have chosen poetry as the form through which to write what is called in this context autoethnographic research, because in poetry, I feel comfortable expressing my emotions when attempting to make sense of my life. My methodology began with writing a retrospective journal from birth to sixteen. Once completed, I highlighted the prominent experiences during that journey—the phase of being an elective mute, my relationship with my father, my search for self-identity, and the hostile environment that surrounded me. The next step was to assemble poetic ideas for each phase I identified followed by a 'free write'. Once I selected the phrases, words and images from what emerged through the act of free writing and identified emerging themes, preoccupations and concerns, I set about creating a first draft, starting in chronological order with 'The Beginning'—and considering the form that each segment would take. Editing was the next important stage, satisfied that each poem embodied the particular emotions I sought to convey. My intention was that the poetry would lead the autoethnographic research, but that poem and prose vignette could stand alone. 'The Beginning' is my way of positioning my presence in this world. I wanted it to describe the unreceptive environment into which I was born, constructed as a mythopoetic history that leads to the event of my birth. The poem alludes to and exudes the hostile environment that was and is par for the course for immigrant populations. I decided that it should flow continuously with no stanzas

that would act to disrupt the journey but to represent orthographically a sense of movement from one place to another ending with me.

Being considered 'other' has always made me feel on the back-foot and it was not surprising when commissioned to undertake this autoethnographic journey that I felt uneasy with the term 'clever' in relation to something I could be as a Black girl in England. Intelligence was not for someone who had English as a second language. I was often reminded that I was not smart. The remnants of low expectation have led me to consider myself a contrary tactician, a fighter, a warrior even, anything but clever. This exploration into pinpointing the moments or events that enabled me to become a 'clever girl' sits on multiple experiences, both inside and outside of my family and surroundings. It is not a journey full of books and nurture but discrimination and a profound longing to belong.

There has always been something 'different' about me in comparison to my siblings. I am one of seven and the only member of my family to have progressed to higher education. As I move through this autoethnography and begin to analyse the character traits I developed, the skills and attributes that made me clever in the wake of multiple adverse situations, I cannot discount that the seeds may well have formed from as early as birth. The account repeated during my childhood left me believing that if I had not had medical assistance to enter this world, I was more than capable of negotiating it independently. This belief led to me feeling comfortable with my own presence and rarely seeking the companionship of friends. I cultivated a strength of character that exhibited itself in an independent nature enabling me to venture into unknown territories with courage. My mother maintained that she had insisted she was ready to give birth and that medical staff had discounted her truth—even though I was the fifth child she had birthed. Their disbelief led to my delivery being something she had to commandeer alone. Embedded within my birth is a story of discrimination and inequality. Later in life, I would question the doctor's decision and wonder, 'Had my mother been white would she have been believed?' Much later, I realised this was how the immigrant population was treated and that successive governments since the 1960s have implemented immigration policies that are fundamentally '"anti-people of color" and xenophobic… in orientation

since at least 1962' (Christian 2005, p. 3). This anti-Black politics has fed into all areas of society. We were soon to realise that by virtue of being Black, unlike European migrants, more able to assimilate, we would not experience the same consideration in terms of the process of adaptation into British society. Our high visibility would forever catapult us into situations of conflict and comparisons (Garrison 1979). Without realising it, this would be my first encounter with racism, and perhaps the beginning of the resilience I have cultivated since.

I was born healthy despite the precarious situation of my delivery. Five years later, I began my schooling. I hated school. I hated having to prove that my dark skin was not dirt. I hated the taunts about how I spoke, it was around this time that I decided not to speak. During the time of being an elective mute, I listened to how language was formed. I learned how to say words quietly to myself and to understand what words outside of my mother tongue meant. I still remember the fear I had when challenged to speak 'properly'. Now when I drop an 'a' and replace it with an 'h' (a Jamaican thing) I no longer feel a pang of shame. I realised that the sound of words was where power was situated, being fluent and concise was important and to be valued; 'broken English' was a curse. Here I am today a poet skilled at performance. I have mastered the art of standing in front of an audience and speaking confidently, flitting between my mother tongue and the language I was forced to learn. I pay homage to the little girl that I was back then, afraid to speak, yet unaware of how my future would unfold. The poem 'Speak!' is written as a villanelle. I chose to imprison it within this form to hold it tight and to make it restrictive in some sense to represent how it felt to be inside my head afraid to come out. I did not want the luxury of free verse and the ability to roam and wander. I also wanted a refrain to act as an affirmation to my five-year-old self. *Don't worry, you will overcome this one day.*

Speak!

Let not the tongue mourn silent in the night
nor let it hide in the grey storms that bray
for your words are as precious as the light.

Should they try to devour you with spite
vultures who sit and pick upon decay
let not the tongue mourn silent in the night.

They swoop and peck at flesh with much delight
crooked monsters who try to mute your say
but your words are as precious as the light.

Take heart the time will come for you despite
the calls and claws that mark and maim your way
let not the tongue mourn silent in the night.

Hold fast, prepare your stance and flex for fight
and pave your way so you can speak one day
for your words are as precious as the night.

Do not elect to keep your lips pressed tight
your tongue will soon become the sword to slay
let it not mourn, but sing and pierce the night
for your words are as precious as the light.

School was problematic on many levels, the rote learning was never my style, being maligned as subnormal engendered a feeling of defeat even before I had begun, and being from another culture, which was starkly different from the British passive aggressive ethos, was all too much. Is it any wonder I lived inside my head for a part of my infant education. Despite this, I learned to read quickly. Becoming literate is tightly connected to my brother who is twenty months older than me. I was not of the phonics generation and learning to read was by word recognition and memory. My brother had a weekly subscription to the *Beano*, *Dandy* and *Topper* whilst I had the weekly edition of *Donald and Mickey*. I was never a *Bunty*, *Mandy* or *Jackie* type of girl. Although I had my own comic book I couldn't read it, and my mother was busy working part time and running the house so I have no memories of her ever reading to me: my brother became my link to understanding the marks on the pages. Once, and only once, did I ever receive a book as a child. That was a gift from my godmother, a little book of prayers. I read it ferociously and memorised

the prayers within it. My brother, who I so wanted to be like, was initially abundant in his willingness to help me read but soon he tired of my incessant demands that interrupted his own reading time and, eventually, the refusal to help came. His refusal meant I had to grasp reading quickly. My competitive spirit, developed from being in a family where survival depended upon it, I engaged my brain and I learned to read. After that, I read everything I could at school. I moved up the book band system rapidly and by the time I entered Junior school I was sprinting along. But, no matter how much I read or how good I was I never became a free reader which upset me enormously. I was very aware of the injustice in this.

My primary education passed in a haze and I was pleased to leave it behind. Although I rescinded my elective mutism by the time I left infant education I was awkwardly shy and spoke very little. Secondary school proved to be a different nightmare. I attended Cottesmore Comprehensive, a school where Black pupils were projected to progress to prison. School was where teachers called us Black kids 'jungle bunnies' and told us, 'Go back to where you came from'. *I was born here, sir, right here in this place*. I didn't know the coconut trees that I was asked to climb. I never arrived on a banana boat. *I was born in City Hospital, Sir!* Secondary school was a battle and came with the realisation I needed more tools in my survival kit other than a command of language. By this stage, my reading was superb and I had begun writing play-scripts for my younger twin siblings to act out, this was to be the beginning of my relationship with writing. School did everything it could to demean me. I was an all-rounder at sports and one year had embarked upon the pentathlon to stretch my skills. To record my time for each event, I had to be timed around the course by two PE teachers. From long jump to high jump I was taunted and goaded to quit by them. I would later learn that this tactic was racism, at its best or worst depending on where you stood. It was the penultimate event, the long jump, where both teachers stood on either side of me and told me I did not have what it took to complete the course. They made it quite clear I would not succeed, I was too small, too skinny… Finally a breath away from the end I did quit. I failed. They had won that race. I made a promise to myself it would be the first and last time I would give up on anything before completing it. Days like the annual

sports day were commonplace. I began to be loud. Louder than I have ever been. I would show them they could not scare me. School taught me to be better. It taught me to prove others wrong. It taught me not to allow anyone to break my spirit.

Yet with all the wrongs thrown at me I knew by virtue of having two adults in my home it gave me an advantage. So the day when two, or maybe there were three… there was definitely more than one teacher, which is why it was so shocking, they, the adults who should have been our role models, they decided to teach us Black kids a lesson… and when they dragged my classmate away, I was left standing outside the cloakroom waiting… it could have been me that day… And then it started and I listened… listened to them beat my classmate with their canes, they beat her and beat her and she screamed and wailed and I stood outside not fully comprehending what was happening… they beat her and beat her and beat her. *Just like the slave narratives of being whipped by massa.* I had had the cane and the strap before when I was summoned to the head teacher's office for something I hadn't done and he said hold out your hand and I did and he whacked me in the palm of my hand and I didn't flinch and I certainly didn't cry and he whacked me again because I hadn't flinched or cried and I would never give him the satisfaction of seeing me cry for something I hadn't done and he whacked me again, saying cry, and I looked even more defiant and wouldn't cry, and he whacked me again and told me I had no self-respect. *It is self-respect that stops me from snivelling Mister Head Teacher.* My encounter was nothing like how the sounds I heard now; they beat her and beat her and I almost left because this thing that they were doing to my classmate was taking too long and I needed to get home before my parents… and when they did finally release her and she ran past me I could see the thick welts on her face, the snot from her nose mingled with the redness of blood… That was my school, the school that should prepare us for the world, my school that beat a kid to the point of near oblivion. Today that school is demolished. I have no fond memories of it. None. I never saw my classmate at school again after that. It's not just the good and the positive that stirs us to do well; often it is adversity that gets us moving. The cruel and the unkind, the desire to be something different, something better, to dismantle this brutality. If only they knew that 'when young people are disenfranchised

or humiliated or made to feel that they have little say and no future, they may become drawn into movements or ideologies that appear to guarantee them a place in the world and give them a solid identity' (Sen 2011, p. 102).

This was my first lesson in how power can be used to destroy. This act and others by teachers in loco parentis led me to dig deeper into what being Black is and means. I may not have known it at the time but this was an important moment because it demonstrated that power, and more explicitly the differential dissemination of power in society, was at the heart of my search for an identity. I began reading 'The Autobiography of Malcom X', poetry by Louise Bennet and books about Rastafarians. I realised injustice happened everywhere and what I needed was inner strength if I was to survive and dismantle racial inequality. I knew if I was to contemplate unravelling racism's snare, I would need to be better. For all its downfalls school taught me how to survive against the adults who had low expectations of me. Adults who brutalised me and my kind. 'This is Not a Story' is about how I began to be vocal. Structured as a double narrative: it has the voice of a narrator and the voice of the underdog. The narrator sets the scene steeped in desires to see the system of domination continue. The protagonist is not shy about coming forward as a warrior forthright in her convictions.

This Is Not a Story

I am the first of my kind
to enter these depths.
I cannot let you meddlers defeat me.
I will darn my time into your cloaks,
learn your rumours.

After one revolution of the sun
she was given a stone.
Ordered to make bread with it,
to double its size, feed a nation
three times over, she said,

I am the daughter of Ruby,
great granddaughter of Imagination.
I shall remain here and plant a seed
somewhere between after and before.
I shall dig until my nails are clogged
with soil, whilst I work I will not waiver.

They did not like her tone and
first sent the boys to tease her,
then the men with angry faces,
finally an army of priests
to scare the black out of her, she said,

You, who make judgments,
who underestimate my will,
who clasp your hands around your heart
so you cannot feel, as you attempt
to scour the courage from me,
will dig two ditches not one.

They put their hands together
as if to pray, hoping
she was something less than ordinary.
Shooed a velvet moth into a corner,
told it to watch her for 37 days,
she said,

You may drive me from your scholarly path.
Tell me I am not big enough to know
because knowledge is your ground.
My thrust will be a pin prick to the eye.
Know this, even the leaf that sits on a branch
will one day fall and wither.

They pulled out their books,
chanted death as thunder cackled
made their mark between the pages,
gave her a sheet without a pen,

told her to write her script.
She said,

You may cause me to shift
with the force of your arm,
but I know your way
better than the lines
in the palm of my hand.
Like ragweed I will attach my spine
beneath the earth.
Choose well, where you blow me.

They shook their heads.
And called the velvet moth
to tell all it had seen.
It would not speak.
Even as they threatened
to tear at its wings
it would not betray.
Instead it rest upon her shoulder.
She said,

Do you not see
no matter how you fashion your trap,
sip your wine in hope of victory,
I will not become a crime scene.
I will use the truth to spear your lies.
I am the first of my kind to enter these depths.
You meddlers cannot defeat me.

School was not the only discomfort in my life. In comparison to some my home was warm: I was fed and clothed and privileged to take part in school plays, visits abroad, and I had shoes. I was clean and tidy, my parents showed some interest in my education by way of attending parents' evenings. For the longest time, I was the eldest girl with my older sister not arriving in England until I was eleven years old, at which time I was then propelled into becoming the middle girl. Sociologists tell us, 'the

idea that children of differing birth order are treated equally has been shown to be highly questionable in research on investment in young children' (Emery 2013). I strongly felt that I was not treated equally. Research conducted by Hilde Bras et al. (2010) that indicates that as the number of siblings increases, children's status falls matched my experience. I became invisible when attention and resources were lavished upon my eldest sister. This led to my teenage years becoming 'rebellious'. My rebelliousness was not drug fuelled or daring in the sense of breaking the law but took the form of challenging my Christian family's beliefs. I denounced my alignment with a white Jesus. I declared openly that he was Black—I was thirteen when I began to embark on this route. I rejected the brown stew chicken, the oxtail soup, and the curried goat for a vegan lifestyle. I began attending 'gatherings' to sit and reason with Rastafarian elders about everything from the bible to repatriating 'back to Africa'. I acknowledged that I was African and not Caribbean, and proclaimed I was Black and proud! By the age of fifteen, to the horror of my family, I would become a Rastafarian. I started reading political literature such as George Jackson and the Soledad Brothers, drinking in the work of Alice Walker, Maya Angelou and Chinua Achebe. Middle child syndrome had begun to direct my path. I came to the conclusion that in order to be noticed, I had to be better than my sister.

My relationship with my father was and is complicated. I approach this cautiously because there is so much said about my culture in terms of absent fathers, bad dads and the whole masculine thing and my aim is not to feed these tropes. I had always sought his approval and each rebuttal made me want his attention and approval more… *get better, be better.* I came to realise that nothing I could ever have done would have pleased him, not even at the age of sixteen when I proudly presented my CSE results which were higher grades than any of my siblings. He dismissed my efforts and chose instead to frame and hang my brother's certificate in the sacred Jamaican front room. I wonder how he really felt inside, not the outward hard exterior that was emotionless but inside when he saw my face crumple, my shoulders droop … Rumours surrounding my paternity had always permeated the background. My great grand uncle would refer to me as 'the stone the builder rejected'—I did not understand what this meant until the day it spilled out and my 'father' told me

he was not my dad. That was a falling downwards pain. I have never met my biological father, neither do I know his name and no matter how much I questioned the elders I was always told to mind my business. He may well no longer exist—I gave up the search before the madness consumed me over two decades ago. I have heard rumours that he was a political man but how accurate this rumour is I do not know. Whilst my mother's husband was devoid of affection, he kept me under his roof until the age of sixteen when he decided enough was enough and I was catapulted out. For all his unkindness, I salute him for providing me with a home and for the warmth of those four walls during my sixteen years. It cannot have been easy seeing the product of his wife's infidelity. For my biological father who remained lost to me, your cowardice in making yourself unknown has propelled me forward. It took years before I turned the loss and sadness into indifference. The poem to represent this phase must be read backwards. It symbolises my struggle to work my way up and back from an emotional abyss to a place of peace. The upside-downness signifies my internal struggle in the realisation that I was fatherless. I dedicate this upside-down-back-to-front poem to my biological father. It encapsulates how inside-out I felt during those formative years. His absence and the presence of a father as a figure that didn't much care for me made me work harder.

Tings people big it's
say they
me with do to nothing got it's
say they and
tongues loose from whispers and
afterthoughts snatched of snippets to
face your fitting-photo
me with
seem sharp
slacks free-crease your in
Lord a like city the around strutting
daughter bastard a forsaking
you
mute no I'm
me

hear to all them want I
this of middle the in I'm
came that child the I'm
ribs her cracking,
jaws her pounding fists clenched from
came that child the I'm
firewater with mingled smells shub-in when
nights passionless from child a
me
down weighted secret the keep to
pus of pools oozing
boil festering a
me
chest my on rubbery and hard
scars keloid left talk their in stab the
pain my watched
refused builder the what was I me told they
teenage-hood in around flailed I

Me

Autoethnography is understood as 'an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)' (Ellis et al. 2010). But what about the things outside of selfhood, things that roam around in the ether? What happens if we take a different approach to becoming a clever girl? If we look beyond the tangible and cast our minds to the spiritual? If we believe there are new souls and old souls and that through some mystical mingling we inherit one or the other and depending on the type of soul—new, old, malevolent, we begin where it left off. What if being in a world where Black is bad is irrelevant, and where placement in family, sibling rivalry, belonging and identity mean nothing either? And the real cusp of the matter is already decided when we inhale our first breath of air? In my culture, there are forces beyond the self, things beyond conception or understanding, things which cannot be evidenced, the extraordinary and the unfamiliar, the

unobservable and the unmeasurable. What about that? An uncanny event is 'normally viewed as something unexpected and unexplainable'. I am from a culture where prophetic dreams and visions are part of the diurnal round. Sixth sense, second sight… like my mother's third eye… Years after I left home my mother telephoned me in the dead of night from across the seas. She told me she saw two of my children walking towards my grandmother in a dream and that she had shooed them away. My grandmother had died several years earlier. She asked if I had installed my smoke detector which I had not but did the next morning. Twenty-four hours later, the sound of that detector interrupted my sleep. Fire! Fire had broken out downstairs. Chance? Coincidence? Uncanniness? I have had warnings a hundred and one times and I have warned others too.

What if who we are and what we will become is designated before we are born. Why did I refuse to regurgitate the hate that was injected inside me? How is it that I have become an established writer and performance poet, and a PhD student at Nottingham Trent University, with a Vice Chancellor awarded scholarship, writing a practice-led PhD rooted in Nottingham Black Archive, the Archive I was clever enough to found ten years ago? Years later, I met my classmate and she still had not recovered from her experience at the hands of those barbaric teachers. She had passed her fear of education onto her children and grandchildren producing two generations of unused minds. Granted, my experience at school was insidious more than physically brutal but I know others like me who gave education a wide berth. Did my strength of character, and my eagerness to learn come from adversity alone? How did I become clever when my home life was literature poor? What if being clever is the result of inheriting a soul that was clever before me?

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10

Being the One Good Thing

Sarah Ward

Clever Girl

I have come to the university library to write this; I have an associate membership from studying here years ago. I find my way to Silent Study and feel my body relax; I feel at home here. I know how to go on with books and libraries; I like the stern and rare expectation of silence. I enjoy being oddly old and having more in common with the staff than students. I arrive very early but the security man lets me in even though my Associate Member card has expired. I assume because I am a middle-aged woman and sensible, no threat. And I have a notion that I talk to him differently, because I grew up working class and I see his job as more worthwhile than an academic's, more like a real job. It is important to me to thank him, see him, acknowledge him. It's the same with the cleaners, who are always friendly here. I was a cleaner too, I want to say, I will never rule out being a cleaner in the future.

I am afraid that I can't do this, write something for this book. In my imagination the other contributors are all at ease, they are more articulate than me and have something important to say. I don't have anything to say; my mouth is dry and my mind is useless. Who do I think I am, anyway? I'm angry,

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irrationally and just a little, that conversations with my friend have become something I don't recognise, a book proposal with requirements I don't feel equipped to meet. Feeling inadequate, ashamed, not clever enough—in the context of this book? The irony is not lost on me.

There are a thousand and one stories I could tell. What keeps me awake at night is the need to tell a clever one.

The story I believed for a long, long time goes like this:

My dad was a clever man but a bad one, and he left before I was two years old. He left 'to be with another lady and her daughters, because his own children weren't good enough for him'. I never saw him again. My mum was devoted to my sister and I and we lived around the corner from my loving grandparents and aunt. Mum worked as a cleaner in our school to make ends meet. She made sure her girls were always beautifully turned out; our hair shone.

Then Mum met another bad man and married him, against advice. I was seven years old and was taken from everything safe, everything I knew, to live in a new town in a horrible house with the horrible man. She told us she married him to give us a better life, but the new life was much worse and bad things happened.

Mum had owned her own semi but now we lived in a tatty council house with this man. I was ashamed of the house and the overgrown garden. My friends had nice houses, and when I went to play with them, it was warm because they had central heating. On winter mornings, I got dressed in front of the Calor gas heater.

My sister 'went off the rails' while we lived with this man. She got arrested, got in with a bad crowd, left home as soon as she could. I felt sorry for Mum, my heart breaking for her daily. I did everything I could to make her happy. She worked long hours in a café, on her feet all day. I worked hard at school. I was good. I tried to make up for everything that had gone wrong. I quietly became a very clever girl.

When Mum finally left this man, I was thirteen and my sister had left home. Mum and I lived in a house on a council estate. She never learnt to drive; we couldn't afford a car anyway. She worked full time in a small boutique, selling clothes she could never dream of buying.

By now, it was official that I was a very clever girl—I was getting top marks in everything at school. I had strong friendships with a good crowd

of sensible kids whose families had nice houses and cars. I was the poor one, but I made Mum really proud. She made sacrifices for me. She bought me a desk so I could revise. My sister went further and further off the rails. From a distance she caused Mum all kinds of upset and shame.

I got an unconditional offer to study Japanese and Economics at university, based on showing extraordinary promise. Everything was set for me to fulfil that promise, travel the world, become rich and famous and take care of everything.

'You're the one good thing in your mum's life', my grandmother told me.

'You've got your father's brains', my mother said.

I got four As in my A levels and went to university.

Growing Up Girl

'Never get married, girls'.

Mum said this, slumped in an armchair, weary and bitter. I learned early on that all men are bastards. Men are weak; they can't say no. They all will, if they think they can get away with it. My father was 'buggerlugs' or 'your father', said with disapproval at best, hatred sometimes. It never occurred to me to miss him.

'Don't marry the boss—*be* the boss'.

Mum said this too, and in saying it, she told me that I must never be like her, working hard, long hours in shops or kitchens. I should be like Auntie Sue, her sister, the 'career woman'. Auntie Sue was the first woman to reach her management position, as good as any man and better than most. Earned her own money, owned her own house, wore suits and had a shiny bob. Auntie Sue had been married, but it hadn't worked out. Auntie Sue once told me she would have loved to have had children, to have had a happy marriage. This didn't fit with the independent career girl dream, so I ignored it as best I could.

'Always keep your own bolthole. Trust no bugger'.

My Nan told me this, intensely and often. She had always worked, always had to, and told me tales of the shifty boss who asked her to work late with him (she ran home instead and told her mam). She told me about the shop where she had to wallop rats with a plank in the back

storeroom, and about running a newsagent kiosk on the station years later, where she had the highest takings of anyone in the region.

'Your sister is just like Mo. And she has the look of your father'.

I heard this a lot—Mo was my Nan's sister, long dead, no better than she should be. She drove a crane in the war and climbed over the fence to run off with men. She was trouble, that much was clear. My sister was like her, apparently, and looked like my dad—another bad'n. What not to be.

So I learned, early and well, that traditional femininity was weakness. Needing a man was pathetic; men would hurt you and take advantage of you, so you would be stupid to chase one. You could be a victim of men (Mum), or an independent woman (Auntie Sue), but you had to be strong (Nan, Auntie Sue, Mum). And you should be good, or you might end up like Mo or my sister.

Brains and independence were prized; I learned to despise traditional feminine preoccupations of marriage, babies, fashion, soppiness. Marriage and babies were for idiots. This wasn't just an idea; I felt it in my body. Inwardly, I recoiled from the sight of a woman with a buggy; the embodiment of weakness.

All these lessons about steering clear of men complicated, but didn't lessen, my teenage longing to be longed for. I knew in my bones that I was ugly, had perhaps used toddler logic to conclude that's why my dad had left. Aged nine or so, I called round for a friend and heard her older brother describe me as 'that fat girl with glasses'; something I have yet to shake off fully, forty years later. As a teenager, I was blundering around knowing that (a) no boy could ever love me, (b) wanting a boy to love me was pathetic anyway, but (c) I desperately, *desperately* wanted to be loved, by a boy, like the other girls. I wanted to be wanted.

My girlfriends were getting boyfriends but I was terrified, clueless, had no idea how kisses happened. I didn't know about flirting, had no intention of making myself silly or girly to make a boy feel clever. I heard myself described as frigid, snooty, a lezza—I was a girl who didn't do being a girl properly, so kids looked for another story to explain me. *I* looked for another story to explain me.

Then the phenomenon of Joan Rivers arrived in the UK. An American comedienne, presenting in the feminine power dressing of the time but

using cruel wit against herself and others to get big laughs and big bucks—I think she was my first exposure to 'the bitch'. A wise cracking fast talker, she was clearly clever, playing the glamour game but taking the piss out of it at the same time. I adored her. When she died recently, I realised that at a crucial time she had provided me with an alternative way of becoming a woman, one I hadn't encountered before and which didn't require prettiness or niceness. This model of womanhood revelled in quick wit, took cleverness and scorn and wove them into something powerful, something that seemed to stick two fingers up at the other ways of being a woman I'd had access to. It suited me down to the ground; I loved making people laugh because I needed to be good and approved of, and nurturing a bitch reputation of course felt far less vulnerable than anyone knowing how lonely and ugly I really felt. There was power and escape here, a way to use my cleverness, my way with words and long-learned 'man hating' to get a laugh. Now we all had a story for the ungirly girl; the frigid lezza became the school bitch, mock-scary and mock-feared.

'Watch what you say to her', the boys would say, laughing. 'She's vicious!'

Hidden Costs

I'm writing this in my home office, at the desk I've had for donkey's years. I notice that there are four phones on the desk—my personal phone, two work phones for different jobs, and a chunky smartphone I've bought for my mum. She doesn't have any technology but is starting to show some interest in getting online, fancies swishing her finger across a screen like she sees everyone else do, instead of pressing buttons on the little phone she's had for so long. Her eyes are getting bad and she needs a bigger screen. She wants a better camera too, and it's rare for her to say she wants something. I read reviews and bought the phone, set it up for her and made some instructions in nice big font. But she keeps putting off my visit.

In the late '80s, I am studying Japanese at a northern university. I'm here because Japanese was the most difficult course to get on to, because I'm good at languages and because the excitable Head of Sixth Form said, her eyes wide with wonder, 'You could study *any language*. You could even study *Persian!*'. Her last word was a purr of exotic delight. Persian! I

had no idea what that even was, but I could tell it was exotic and difficult and therefore special and good.

I have no one at home to advise or guide me, no one who had ever been to university. I don't want to go to Oxford or Cambridge because I knew I would be the poor kid there, surrounded by toffs. Apparently there's no one at my school who can teach languages to the level required for the Oxbridge entrance exam, anyway.

A Japanese and Economics degree required the highest grades, so that's what I applied for. I only seem to want to do very difficult things. There is an initial language-study year, then we begin the degree proper. With Japanese and Economics, so the story goes, I will be perfectly placed to work in international finance and make a million. I will buy Mum a house and a car and make sure she never has to worry about money again.

But I am unhappy at university. I don't fit in. It turns out that Oxford send their first year Japanese Studies students to this northern university, so I am studying alongside the children of actual millionaires, some of whom I've heard about on the news. I'm acutely aware of being from a council estate. There is a little group of us, clever kids from northern towns, goths and misfits, and we huddle together. We study alongside but distinct from glossy-haired rich kids who, we gradually discover, are also lost. Many of them never saw much of their family; they were sent to boarding school and often spent holidays on different continents to their parents, in their several homes. Rich kids, also adrift. It feels like we are all looking for something.

I'm apart from Mum for the first time. I live in a little box in student halls of residence; she's in a little box back on the estate. My new friends down the corridor are the daughters of professors, teachers, an MP. My mum works in a shop and was ashamed last time she gave blood because when she put her feet up on the bed she realised someone might see the cardboard she'd put in her shoes to cover the holes. She can't afford new shoes just at the moment but says she's fine. In my room at university, I have a new duvet, a kettle and a toaster, some mugs on a mug stand all bought for me. Mum can't afford new shoes.

I am to spend my third term in Japan, studying and living with Japanese families. We will move around, see the country, and will stay with five different families in all. We are given a handout of guidance

about what to take. We are told we must take gifts for each host family, that the Japanese place great importance on gift giving. Our gifts should be good quality and indicate Britishness. I feel sick when I read this; I don't know how we can afford it. Next time I'm home, Mum and I go to shops we never usually go in. We look for small, affordable, good quality British things. We buy posh jams and tea in presentation tins, try to buy pieces of nice English china but can only afford very small ones. We tell ourselves that small things are good because they will be easier to pack. I know that Mum can't afford this at all. I have jobs every holiday but I don't earn much. I also need new clothes for the warm weather, a suitcase and some spending money. The canvas shoes I get are cheap and quickly start to smell when I get to Japan. I'm not alone; the little group of northern clever kids I'm friends with all have smelly shoes and our clothes are strange. I start to learn how richer kids dress; leather shoes which don't smell bad, pale linen (I learn it's OK that it creases), doing clever things with scarves.

My presents are accepted graciously and the families I stay with seem to like me. I come equal top in the end of year exams, but I know that I don't want to study Japanese or Economics any more. Somewhere along the way, through my non-Japanese studying friends, I have discovered Sociology and feminism. I have discovered that I am a not a man-hater or a bitch, I'm a feminist. I have started to learn new words which mean more to me than Japanese verb endings. I tell Mum that I want to give up Japanese and study Psychology and Sociology instead. I know I'm ruling out a supposed career as an international financier, I am confused about how I feel. But Mum is kind about it, feeds me and sends me back to start my new degree.

Over the next three years, alongside my studies, I discover more liberating resources for managing womanhood. Feminism makes sense, to me and of me. Becoming friends with lesbians and gay men feels like coming home, despite me always remaining straight. Here was a world of totally different expectations for what made a man or a woman attractive or valuable. Here were friends who felt like outsiders the way I did, who had been hurt by straight gender norms like I had. Here were discos where I could dance in fun and sexy ways with men who wouldn't grope or ignore me. I hear the term 'fag hag' and don't like it, but I like the experience. I

go to Pride; I read *Spare Rib*. When I'm at home with Mum for long summer holidays I work as a cleaner in the nearby hospital and order *The Guardian* from the shop on the estate. I still don't have a boyfriend.

Returning the Scholarship

I'm writing this at a small hotel in Spain. My husband has gone out with the walking group but I've stayed back to write and snooze. I'm very, very happy here. It's quiet and very beautiful, a small hotel in the mountains we've stayed at several times. Each time I stay my happiness makes room for an awareness that my real life now reads like a middle class Sunday supplement travel piece. I'm literally sitting in a converted olive mill, for god's sake, in a hotel which 'feels like staying with friends'. But I've still not gained a taste for actual olives, despite trying because it feels like a middle-class taste I should have by now. And I've certainly never had friends who live in a house like this. What am I doing here? When my Mum is still on her council estate, with back pain she is downplaying and diabetes she isn't managing. How can I have all this happiness? I have failed to make a million, buy her a house and make sure she never has to worry about money again. She's financially stable but that's from an inheritance from someone she never expected to outlive, someone she misses bitterly, not from anything I've done. She has never allowed me to give her anything. She rarely lets me visit.

I graduate with a First, because I am a clever girl and work hard. But I don't know what I want to do next, so I work as a temp for a while to pay off my very tiny student loan (loans have only just been introduced; my first couple of years of study had been entirely grant funded). I fall in love with a man who also grew up in a council house. I am comfortable taking him home to meet my Mum, something I've never felt before. We have a shared understanding of what it means to grow up working class in an affluent town, and we are both very aware that we are paying rent to a friend whose parents bought her a house as a gift. He has a more political, structural analysis of how this works to perpetuate inequality, and I love his quiet principles.

I apply for a Fulbright Scholarship; I am still drawn to whatever is the most difficult thing. For the interview, I have a make-up lesson at a

department store beauty counter, because I want to look right. The interviewers ask me about my aims. I plan to do a Masters in communication studies in New York state, and will then work for charities and promote women's rights. They ask about my hobbies and I talk about being in a play at university. I say I enjoyed it, but it wasn't really me, that I felt like Victoria Wood trying to play Lady Macbeth. Everyone laughs. I feel like part of a quota.

I am awarded a Fulbright Scholarship, this clever girl from a council estate. But as arrangements are made, it becomes apparent that I need more money and confidence than I have access to. It's the hidden costs again, things like money for the phone calls to the American university to arrange things and money for a deposit for accommodation. And I am afraid of having no money, of leaving my mum, of leaving my boyfriend. I lack faith that if something goes wrong I will be safe, because I have never had someone to bail me out. It can be hard to take risks when you're used to having just enough and nothing spare, nothing for a rainy day. And it's hard to leave love, when you've only just found it. I give the Fulbright Scholarship back.

I stay in the UK, work in research for a few years, start a PhD. In my third year I give up the PhD, in a painful, self-hating depression. My mum's patience with my straying from the path of fulfilling my clever potential comes to an end; she is horrified and furious with me for giving up academia. This sudden experience of being bad, the clarity with which she shows me I am letting her down, illuminates suddenly how much I have always been trying to be good, do my homework and bring her shiny prizes. Depression—and framing it as being 'ill'—gives us both a way of allowing me to fail. I start temping again, get a part-time, low-paid job, and begin to peel off the heavy, clanking armour of 'extraordinary' I can no longer bear to wear.

Do You Remember?

I'm writing this at the desk in my therapy room. I share this room with one other therapist and it is warm, spacious and comfortable. I love my work. I am a counsellor and/or psychotherapist, depending who I'm talking to. As I

write those words, I'm aware of how instinctively I assess who might feel more comfortable with 'counsellor' and who, on the other hand, would judge me as 'less than' unless I call myself a psychotherapist. I make these judgements daily, just out of consciousness, never needing to name the signs of class and education which guide each choice. Thinking about it now, however, I know exactly what I'm doing.

For the next decade, I work for charities, for the public sector, I earn money. I try to look after Mum but she won't be looked after by anyone. I remain in love. I have holidays. I feel guilty for being happy and comfortable. Now and then I feel the old urge to achieve something extraordinary but I recognise it; I know its siren call and lash myself to my happy, ordinary life and sail on. I have a couple of episodes of severe depression, fight fierce battles with self-accusations of failure, but somewhere along the way I give myself permission to be happy as I am. I want to be a counsellor by the time I'm forty, and I manage to qualify at forty-one. I love the work and feel none of the paralysing performance anxiety I have lived with for so long.

I am still the clever girl from the council estate. Some days it's uncomfortable, but not that often. When we go for lunch with my husband's university colleagues, for example, or when I stay with girlfriends, I feel the old awkwardness. They all have the *right things*, all the matching things to present a lunch with, dishes for this and that, casually stylish. They know about salad dressing, olives, are at ease with table linen, ingredients. At home, we cook simple things using as few pans as possible. We don't buy things like salad servers if a fork and spoon will do. I am always conscious of not getting it right, because I know just enough to sense what things I should have in my middle-class life but can't bring myself to spend money on them.

Or when my grown-up niece comes to visit, just after I've bought a Dyson vacuum cleaner. Dyson—an indicator of affluence which I've put off buying for years, despite secretly wanting one, wanting the best for once. I've just taken the middle-class Dyson plunge when my niece comes to stay and I am mortified—carefully hiding the Dyson, its box and any evidence. I don't know if she has any feelings about hoovers and class but I can't bear for her to see it; it would be like showing off, like rubbing her nose in my relative wealth. My therapist is surprised and sad for me,

when I mention the hoover hiding. I don't understand why she feels sad—surely it's normal to hide your good fortune, be ashamed of your comfort? But perhaps that, too, is a marker of difference. She doesn't understand that it's what you do, when you grow up without things and with people who won't be helped. You hide the things you have from the people who can't have them.

So yes, there are these moments of discomfort, of failing to pass, of falling *between*, but I'm very happy. Most days I'm staggered by how lucky I am to have the life that I have.

But.

If I were not happily married to a man with a permanent job, good income and a generous heart, would I have the luxury of working as a self-employed therapist? I don't think so. I have recently allowed myself to pay less than my share of the mortgage; I am now relying on a man. Even writing it makes me feel sick, agitated, embarrassed, with 'trust no bugger' and 'don't marry the boss, *be* the boss' echoing inside. I remember being out for a meal in my late twenties and being told, pointedly, by an older woman in the group who knew a few things about me, that the reason there are so few women in positions of power is 'they give back their Fulbright Scholarships and have babies'. I didn't have the babies but she's right, I have failed to achieve the model of independent success that my cleverness apparently obliged me to pursue. I'm somewhat financially dependent on a man, and I spend my days listening to mostly middle-class people talking about their problems while my mum still lives on a council estate. This is not how things were supposed to go.

School report

The contents of the kitchen bin are spread across the floor,
mum is crying, picking among used teabags.
I'm so sorry, she says, *I'm such a stupid bitch.*
I don't know how—but then she finds it,
there among the wet waste.
My school report.

I brought it home yesterday,
the best school report I'd ever had,
the best school report anyone could have,
'excellent' ticked for every aspect of every subject,
every teacher glowing in their praise of me.

Such a flimsy booklet, light tissuey pages,
too slight for such a weight of expectation and redemption.
Mum cried when she read it, over and over
and out loud and on the phone, confirmation
of her extraordinary daughter being extraordinary,
despite everything. But then somehow,

some time that night, between the reading
and the going to bed and dreaming
of who knows what glories,
she accidentally put it in the kitchen bin
with the day's scraps and mess.

I helped her search the next morning,
saw her panic, tried to reassure her that we'd find it,
that it didn't matter anyway, helped her
pull out furniture, lift cushions,
peer under the settee, look in the fridge
then desperately through the bin.
She found it at last—tea stained and wrinkled—
and still has it, 35 years later.

It's wrinkled still, and stained, frozen
in its declaration of my perfection.
She still calls herself a silly bitch, recalls losing it,
how her heart stopped in horror.
'*Do you remember?*' she says, '*Do you remember?*'

11

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Jan Bradford

Introduction: Tell Me the Old Old Stories

Taking forward Richardson's (1997) call to write 'writing-stories' which are always personal and political (2001), this chapter interweaves a series of writing-stories inspired by oft-told and well-established family stories to explore the writer's experience of 'growing up' as a Scottish working-class 'clever girl' who struggles to negotiate the socio-political, familial and academic challenges she encounters. Engaging with Cixous' (Cixous et al. 1976) call for woman to write herself, putting herself into the text, the world into history by her own movement, this chapter will draw lightly on psychoanalytic, sociological and folklore literature to offer glimpses of the embodied push-and-pull tension experienced within the writer's deep-felt sense that her narrative inheritance (Goodall 2005) has always already caught her up in a tangling kerfuffle of conflicting wants, longings and desires which leave her tentative and hesitant of 'being a clever girl' if it involves straying too far from the apparent security of the 'belonging' offered by the binding ties of 'home'.

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'You Are One of "Us"'

My maternal great-grandmother—Maw—dies before I am born. We never meet in person. She does not hold me. I do not lie in the curve of her arms. But I am told that as she lay in bed—swelling up with dropsy[1]—Maw's fingers did not sit idle. Notorious for being a hard worker, Maw was industrious to the end as she crocheted and knitted; her elbows and wrists rhythmically jerking to make needles and wispy-fine-lace-weight wool click-and-fly together, creating soft white matinee jackets, bootees and shawls that anticipate the impending arrival of a new great-grandbaby. Maw does not know I will be her first great-grand*daughter* because—as Mum points out:

> *there were no scans back in our day…you didn't find out until your wee one was born and you were grateful for whatever God sent you…but…*and Mum will continue with absolute certainty*…you know…they say your Maw loved the wee baby boys best…and that's true…but she so wanted to live to see you born and to hold you… and she would have loved you so… a wee baby girl… another one of 'us'!*

The fleecy labour of my great-grandmother's handiwork lies in wait to clad my newborn female nakedness. But we are born not only into a physical world of matter that shapes us; a less material world that is filled with a landscape of stories also lies in wait; and it is the stories that circulate in our families that shape us first and shape us most (McLean 2015). Family stories connect individuals across generations (Martin et al. 1998).

The stories we inherit from our ancestors offer a framework for understanding our identity through theirs (Goodall 2005), as stories ask us to consider our connections and relations to a particular time and place (Brockmann 2017); and children listen and learn to situate events and place family members in relation to 'before' or 'after' they were born, which offers a finite sense of intervention in the world and helps family identity to be built up (Tonkin 1992).

[1] Old-fashioned term for oedema.

Just like the hand-knitted layette Maw leaves behind, a host of family stories and tales of family lore are already lying-in-wait to swaddle me. The collection of stories told to me by and about family members, including accounts of births, marriages, deaths and a raft of well-intentioned Old Wives' tales transmitting practical wisdom are my narrative inheritance (Goodall 2005), and they envelop my being and affect my becoming. I inherit stories I can recite word-by-word off by heart and stories that I almost—but never really—come to forget ever having heard until I hear them again and they trigger a re-remembering. I inherit stories that relate events or involve family members I know or remember. I inherit stories that talk about things that happened and people who lived '*way-way* back before my time' and involve long-buried relatives being storied back to life as their past antics are relived, regaled and reviled. I inherit stories that transmit cultural traditions or relate cautionary tales and superstitions. And—perhaps most importantly—I inherit stories that remind me of 'where *I* come from' and 'how far *we* have come'.

'You Come from a Long Line of Strong Women'

We live in other people's pasts whether we know it or not, or whether we want to or not (Tonkin 1992). Mum likes to tell me stories about 'our past' as I am growing up.

> *You are a lucky wee girl, Jan…you've got so many opportunities I never had… we struggled just to make ends meet! There was plenty of love and always food on the table but it was a hard life…your Maw and Dey didn't have two ha'pennies to rub together when I was growing up. You don't know you're born these days with all the opportunities you've been given…just make sure you use them…but always remember where you came from mind—that's important—and you're a lucky wee girl because you come from good stock…*

And then there is a pause before the inevitable punchline that I have come—over the years—to recognise as the family story that establishes 'me' as who 'I am', who 'I have always been' and who 'I will always be

expected to be'. *Yes*…Mum continues sagely…*mind and always remember that you come from a long line of strong women.*

Four generations of women feature in this 'long line of strong women': me, Mum, Mum's mum (Nana) and Nana's mum (Maw). Each of us in this 'long line' was birthed at home into the arms of a close-knit declining mining community. Each of us was named and christened 'Janet' after each other, although each of us is given their own 'pet name': I am 'Jan', Mum is 'Janette', Nana is 'Jennet' and Maw is 'Nettie'. Each of us is also gifted the maiden names of our maternal grandmother and great-grandmother as middle names. At school, other girls have sensible middle names like 'Catherine' or 'Margaret' whilst I have two silly sounding middle names that induce schoolgirl-giggling and, to top it off, the teachers call me 'Janet' because that is my 'official' name. Derrida (1995) philosophically questions 'what's in a name?' I practically question the seeming senselessness of lumbering a child with a name they are not called. Mum remains unreservedly unrepentant…*Don't be silly Jan, you were named after Nana and Maw and you couldn't be named after two better folk!*

The female foetus develops the full set of egg cells she will have in her lifetime whilst she is in the womb. This plants a rather beautiful image of nesting Matryoshka Dolls in my mind. In the Winter-Spring of 1923, during the aftergloom of the Great War as Maw's pregnant belly swells with the foetus that will become Nana, the precursor cell of the egg that will become Mum is already inside Nana who grows inside Maw. When it is Nana's turn for her pregnant belly to swell during the Autumn-Winter of 1947, under the shadow of a post-war austere Britain, the precursor cell of the egg that will become me is already inside Mum who grows inside Nana. When it is Mum's turn for her pregnant belly to swell in the long hot mini-skirted summer of 1971, the precursor cell of the egg that will become the baby girl I will give birth to thirty years later lies nestled inside me as I grow inside Mum.

Do you know…? I ask my youngest…*when I was pregnant with you…* I am told to 'Stop!' but I carry on regardless as I share my image of the nesting dolls. It starts a train of thought so I continue

when I first felt you move – my fingertips feeling your first flutters through the stretching skin on my belly, it was the 11th September 2001. I was watching live television coverage of the Twin Towers. I was overwhelmed with love as I felt your quickening and I was so glad you were safe and secure inside me but I remember wondering what kind of world I was bringing my baby into… but I suppose there have always been wars and I had money and security and a nice home and I was lucky – and you were lucky too because you weren't ever going to have to go without – and now I wonder what it was like for Maw and Nana giving birth after wars with no money or security and…

My voice trails off as I falter for what to say next…I feel something… but I'm not sure what? Pain? Shame? Judgement? Anger? I do not know… so I gloss over it and continue chatting to my youngest…*anyway, I just thought you might want to know where you come from… and you come from me and Gran and Nana and Maw… you come from a long line of strong women.*

'You Were Never Going to Be 'Looked Down On' or Want for Anything'

Mum always says people looked down on her when she was growing up

…oh yes…folk thought they were better than us because we never had what other folk had and I knew we were looked down on and I promised myself that no-one would look down on you like that…no-one was ever going to make you feel that way!

Mothers spend half their time referring to their own childhoods as a point of comparison when they bring up their children (Forster 1995) so when Mum tells me this story it sounds like yet another monotonous series of seemingly set-in-stone words talking about a past that I have never known and I do not think ever has the power to affect me. I never wondered why people might look down on Mum. I never wondered why people might look down on me. But I knew by her actions that Mum worried that people might judge us and 'find us wanting' because she was

'particular' about my appearance: scraped-back pony-tailed hair, short clean nailbrush-scrubbed fingertips; polished 'Startrite' shoes—*you look spotless…like you've just stepped out of a bandbox* was one of Mum's ultimate compliments. And Mum was particular too about the way I spoke… *we might not have had much money but you were sent to elocution lessons so you learned to speak properly!*

Nana used to say 'Old habits die hard'. When I sit with a group of academics, relaxing after-hours at a conference—I realise Nana is right. A colleague asks if my nails are clipped short because I bite them. I feel exposed. I stare at my short neatly clipped pale-pink polished nails…*No! I don't bite my nails…I keep them short so I can type faster!* I am a liar. I keep my nails clipped short-and-scrubbed so there is no opportunity for dirt to accumulate under them. Mum and Nana used to say—'Cleanliness is next to godliness'. And I paint my nails the palest sheerest pink so they look well groomed, but any chips will go unnoticed because chipped nail-varnish is a wee bit tacky and I don't want to look 'trollopy'.

After her mother dies a *'working-class death'*, Steedman discovers a written reference that confirms to potential employers that her mother was '*clean, strong, honest and intelligent*' and she finds herself weeping for a world where people might have doubted the cleanliness of her mother and—by association—her own cleanliness; and she goes on to say '*there are people everywhere waiting for you to slip up, to show signs of dirtiness and stupidity, so that they can send you back to where you belong*' (1986, p. 34). When I am gifted a 'fun' mug with the popular slogan 'You can take the girl out of X but you cannot take X out of the girl'—where 'X' marks the name of the town where I am born—I laugh and say 'thank you' but it leaves me unsettled.

Hanley (2016) notes the almost impossible difficulty of traversing class boundaries, and this resonates with me when I take forward Cixous' (Cixous et al. 1976) call towards a feminine writing that writes woman and lets my body be heard because it is simultaneously exhilarating and embarrassingly exposing to speak from a working-classed body that is always already judged and is inevitably found to be distasteful (Bourdieu 1986). The body and its dispositions are markers of social class, and Skeggs (1997) suggests women invest in their bodies as a form of cultural capital. Mum seemed to instinctively know this as she invested in my dress, cleanliness

and speech. Mum still reminds me that *It is important not to let yourself go, Jan!*

Whilst Cixous (Cixous et al. 1976) acknowledges we cannot deny that the effects of the past remain within us, she insists we must not allow our future to be determined by it. But I am left struggling with how we can write our stories when we cannot say where the 'I' begins and ends (Eakin 2004). Mum's little girl-self might have promised herself that 'I' would never be looked down on … but perhaps it is inevitable that I will always be caught in that bind of knowing–knowing exactly where I have come from and where I belong.

'You Are Lucky to Be Here'

Mum loves the opportunity to tell the story of my birth. It is a performance (Pollock 1999). Birth stories are always—perhaps like the women who tell them—everywhere and nowhere all at once. As sanitised comic-heroic retellings, perpetuating sociocultural desires and expectations for grander normalised narratives, birth stories paper over the cracks and gaps of embarrassing, inappropriate and taboo stories of birthing that are shamed and hushed, hustled into the margin of decent conversations (Pollock 1999), emphasising that if there is one place to find the repressed, it is the taboo of the pregnant woman (Cixous et al. 1976). Women's leaky bodies—burgeoning, birthing, menstruating, menopausing—make themselves present, leading to their appropriation in medicalisation (Edwards 2005) as the rise of the hospital, in line with the larger history of industrialisation, unravelled bodily life from the social rites and economies in which it was traditionally enmeshed—a place where it was women—midwives, doulas, neighbours and mothers who reigned supreme.

Maw's 'cousin', maiden 'Aunt' Teenie (who attended all the family births) terrified Mum with gory birth stories from her years of birthing-room wisdom experience…

> Oh aye…you leave your dignity at the door when you're giving birth and pick it back up on the way ooot…Oh aye… it's all fine when the heid crowns but it's when the shooders come out…that's the worst!

Mum is relieved when I am born safe and well after a straightforward delivery…

> *Oh I had an easy time delivering you… but I had a bad feeling before… I was almost four weeks overdue with you and the midwife was coming to start me on Friday 13th and…well thank goodness she came a day early to start me because… well, you know…*

And then, there is a pause…before Mum, with no hint of superstition, delivers the punchline of the birth story that has—over the years—settled in place the notion that I was lucky to be born alive—that I am lucky to be here today…*I knew…I just knew that if they waited to start me and you were born on Friday 13th you wouldn't have survived… you wouldn't be here now.*

As a child, I listen—eyes agog—to the dramatic circumstances surrounding my entry into the world. They give 'me' meaning: I am a special little girl who is lucky to be born alive. I do not question any of the telling until I am pregnant and am preparing to give birth… 'Really Mum, are you sure you were almost four weeks overdue…?' But Mum is adamant.

> *You can laugh all you like, but I know – because I was there… and I was right… your afterbirth was all black and rotting and you were blue… you had to be put in a boiling hot bath to warm you up!*

The flat where I am born is demolished just months after my birth. Mum shakes her head with disappointment when she tells this part of the story… *It was a damp dirty hole. Water from the river was seeping up under the foundations of the flats so they were declared structurally 'unsound'*. But there is a positive. Mum is a private person…*always best to stay a wee bit reserved and keep yourself to yourself…but oh the neighbours were lovely folk.* And then Mum will say—with a sense of dignified pride

…as soon as you were born and I was tidied up the neighbours came to collect the bedsheets… and they were handed back the next day all beautifully pristine clean. You know, we might not have had much and we all had to make do but we all did the best we could! You know, the bedroom you were born in might have been hanging with damp but it was spotlessly clean…you could have ate your dinner off it!

A human being would be a dispersed figure without the shelter of the house which collects and contains past, present and future, integrating our thoughts, memories and desires as it allows us to daydream (Bachelard 1958). This birth home is where 'I' come from. Is it—I wonder—the back to which I belong? Winterson (2001) asserts that filth, cold, hunger or trauma do not matter because it is only dinginess and the small damp confines of the mediocre with its gradual erosion of beauty and light and the continual compromising that is death to a writer. I think about this when I daydream about my birth home and I find myself writing about the stagnant water that rots its foundations and seeps up to riddle the walls with damp. I feel the dinginess of it. The home we are born in is physically inscribed in us (Bachelard 1958). I shudder at the poverty of damp, peeling, structurally disintegrating walls. But I am also lulled with the security of being born into a home where respectable women afford each other dignity with their service as they quietly launder a neighbour's post-bloodied bedsheets.

'You Came into This World with a Book in Your Hand'

Some people are born with a silver spoon in their mouth, but Mum says I came into this world with a book in my hand, reading…*You could always read… I remember when you started school…* And so begins the story of me being a 'wee genius!' …*Teacher said you could read as well as any of the Primary 7 girls when you started in P1. Imagine!* But I do not need to 'imagine' because I remember: I remember the school bell ringing to signal 'Hometime'; I remember waiting behind in the deserted classroom; I remember listening to cleaning ladies chit-chatting, buffing

scuffy-mucky footprinted corridors as they swept away the remains of the school day, leaving behind floors so shiny-bright 'you could almost see your face in them'. But above all—I remember the lingering smell of 'school'. Smell is a potent wizard (Synnott 1993) and writing, Cixous (2010) asserts, is a faithful tool that allows the sparks of the not-yet-thought to surface from the depths of our bodies to become a 'thinking' that can be formulated, repeated and grasped. When I write the smell of 'school' where the lingering, familiar but unhomely sweet aroma from a hoard of damp sweaty infant school children mingles with the dusty particles of ash that have floated over from the coal-fired boiler room (where, according to schoolchildren chit-chat, the Devil might lurk) and mixes with the omnipresent stench of overboiled school-dinner cabbage, I am immediately transported back. I am there—again that little girl—a little girl who does not know yet what she thinks, who has little grasp of the world other than the words she loves to read… 'I' am the clever little girl who is 'special' because she stays behind with Teacher reading the books that the big girls read.

Mum says Teacher kept me behind for extra reading so I didn't get bored. I don't remember being bored in P1B. I remember winning a prize for my story about 'A Dormouse' because Teacher presented me with a 'Holly Hobby' notebook in front of the class as a reward. *What a clever wee girl you were!* Mum kept the notebook safe in the middle long-drawer of her dressing table where she kept 'precious' things like birth certificates and school report cards. I liked to rake through the drawer and look at my Holly Hobby notebook. I never wrote in it. It was a special notebook. And I was a special little girl because I won it. *You were a 'wee genius'.*

I might not remember being bored in Primary 1B but I definitely remember being 'bored' in Primary 2B when Teacher made us stand in a circle to practise our alphabet. I remember standing waiting for my turn to recite whatever letter was next… *a-b-c-d-e-f…x-y-z…a-b-c…* round-and-round, again and again—I take my turn and recite the next letter. Outwardly dutiful and compliant, 'I' am a good little girl—'I' am a pleasing pupil—'I' always do what Teacher says. But inwardly? I remember that 'I' am a seething mass of rage. 'I' am concentrating on keeping this cooped up as I stand quietly-still whilst inwardly stamping my feet up

and down inside my head. Imagine what might have happened if I unleashed all that wild rage I thought and felt in the moment?

> *This is a waste of time. I am bored. Why we are we doing this? I don't want to recite letters… I want to make words… I want to write sentences… I want to write paragraphs and read pages of books. I want….*

What did I want? I wanted 'more'. But my little-girl-self always already knew—because she picked up her inheritance at birth and she learned as she went along as she grew up, just as Mum and Nana and Maw had learned too—we could recite it as a chorus: 'I want does not get'.

Nana used to say 'All good things must come to an end'. And thus ends the story of my being a 'wee genius'.

> *Just like that…one day with no rhyme-or-reason, you just stopped!* Mum clicks her fingers. *One day you could read fluently and write well and then the next you couldn't read properly and you couldn't even hold a pencil in your hand and nobody knew why*. Mum shakes her head before she delivers the punchline. *But it was probably for the best because you know what they say… 'genius is akin to madness'.*

And we both nod. And we leave it there.

'You Were Always a Good Girl'

Words are powerful as they reach out across time and place and space to touch us (Cixous 1998). As I write in the present, I find myself reinvigorating the long-forgotten flushes of contentment that swept over my little-girl self as she sat cross-legged on Nana's living room floor, making up sentences with the words Teacher placed in the Word Tin that I carry to-and-fro school in my brown leatherette satchel.

The reverence placed on my Word Tin is forgotten until it is my turn to become 'Mum' and the P1 teacher reminds parents to put 'Vitalite' margarine tubs in their children's rucksacks so they have something to store their words in. *I never normally buy 'marge'…only the best 'Lurpak'*

butter just like your Gran and Nana…your Maw kept a guid meat-house and they learned from her and I learned from them! I say to the kids, only half-joking, as I scrub out the greasy residue and wonder what to do with the mountain of margarine I've transferred to a Tupperware tub. And then I remember it—my school Word Tin. *You know… I had one of Papa's tobacco tins to store my words in.* The kids shake their head. You took a cigarette tin to school? *Yes*. What did people think? *Nothing….it was normal back then.*

Memory sparked, I reminisce aloud about my 'Golden Virginia' Word Tin.

It was a 'posh' green colour… sort of Harrods coloured…quite classy really… it still smelt of tobacco…although obviously it was cleaned out because 'baccy[2] *was dear and you wouldn't want to waste it!* The kids tut. *I still love the smell of tobacco. I've never smoked but I love the smell of it…it smells of 'home'. Your Nana and Papa were forty-a-day chain-smokers. Your Gran used to say they smoked like chimney-lums! I remember Nana's living room! It had a big brown and orange stripy velour three-piece suite crammed into it. The walls were papered with yellow-and-brown flocked hessian wallpaper. The ceiling was rough-artexed. Nicotine stickily clung-and-hung to every textured surface.* The kids' eyes disapprove *It sounds 'yucky' but it wasn't really… it felt homely and normal… it was the '70s.*

I continue my trip down an ambivalent lane of dead-end memories

your Papa liked roll-ups. I remember sitting cross legged on the floor contentedly rolling up fags for him and his mates. Nana liked Embassy Regal and I got sent to the shops to buy them for her as Nana didn't go out much with her 'nerves'. The newsagents didn't do 'tick' so when there was no money, I had to ask for one or two 'single tips' and the shop assistant would bring out a tin from under the counter and hand me single cigarettes. The kids tut. Was that legal?! *I was just doing as I was told…I was a good girl! And do you know…when I am thirteen and I get a job in the newsagents they still have a tin with single tips that I sell from under the counter.* Was that legal? *I don't know. it seemed normal back then… and I was just doing as I was told… I was a good girl!*

[2] Informal term for 'tobacco'.

And I pause—it is only in hindsight I can look back at my thirteen-year-old Saturday-Girl-self and then further back again at my little-girl self, both 'doing as they are told'—and wonder about what being a 'good girl' meant and wonder about the lack of choice poverty affords us.

Back then people used to say 'children should be seen and not heard' and 'always respect your elders'…you weren't allowed to cheek back… you knew your place… you don't know you're born these days with all your opinions!

In hindsight, I just followed the rules and did as I was told—as I bought and sold and rolled up cigarettes. I was ignorant and innocent. I was a good girl—a sweet dirty-blonde pony-tailed, on-the-outskirts, nondescript little girl—just running errands and doing as she was told.

'You Became One of Those Career Girls'

I was just twenty-seven when I fell pregnant with my first baby but Mum and Nana had already given up hope… *You'd left it so late I wondered if you were having trouble 'down below'* Mum says… *and your Nana was beginning to think you'd turned into one of those 'career girls' and you weren't going to give us any (great)grandbabies!*

Unlike Nana and Maw I did not 'need' to get married. I did things 'properly'. Aged twenty-two, I walked down the aisle on my proud Dad's arm with a demure white veil covering my face, a string of pretty fake pearls around my neck and Mum's wedding-bible decorated with a spray of white roses and gypsophilia in my hand. I was the picture-perfect young virgin bride and with a thick yellow gold band safely secured on my ring finger, I had the luxury of already being 'Mrs' when I fell pregnant. But Nana was right. I *had* turned into (and *loved* being) one of those 'career girls'.

A student-grant-funded first-generation university graduate, I spent my twenties knee-deep in paperwork not nappies as I climbed quickly to what in my family seemed like the unimaginably giddy career-ladder heights of being 'a manager' *Imagine that hen,* Dad said with quiet respect—*it's you who is the boss – telling other folk what to do, not the one*

being told. Dad's disbelieving pride in me being 'one of the high-heid yins' not a worker like him was less treasured by Mum who was relieved as I didn't have to work like her—*always skivvying after other folk*—took her delight in my career success from the fact that my husband and I had a mortgage and lived in a 'private' (not a 'council') house—*I was just saying to your Nana—imagine—our Jan lives in a private house—a double-fronted house too! Imagine—folk like us are usually the ones working to folk like her!*

The year I hosted Christmas dinner in my posh brand-new home, Mum and Nana oooh-ed and aaah-ed with approval, nodding—*lovely… classy…!*—Nana—gleeful that she had found four of the six 'silver-styled charms' I'd carefully sterilised and wrapped in greaseproof paper and mixed into the Christmas pudding sat contentedly—possibly a wee bit 'sloshed' from the champagne she'd sipped from my wedding-gifted Edinburgh Crystal flutes—and declared *I've never had champagne before… You know, I never thought I'd be sitting like this—imagine—'me' sitting here like this, in my granddaughter's house, in a dining room, eating my Christmas dinner at a proper table.*

The mahogany-veneered table we sat around was purchased on a 'pay-nothing-now plus 2 years' interest-free credit' deal. We were mortgaged to the hilt, terrified the interest rate tide might turn at any time. If you scratched under the surface of the generative 'look how well I've done for myself' which fed into the 'look how far we've come' family success story, you could see the almost invisible fault-line crack starting to appear. I work hard. I desperately want to be 'a success'…but it feels tenuous…and I am always mindful that, as Nana liked to say, 'Pride comes before a fall!' I hear the unspoken voices speak out in my head:

> *Imagine – what if our Jan becomes all highfalutin…what if our Jan becomes one of those folk who forgets where they come from? I mean…have you heard about so-and-so – Oh aye! – She never came back at Christmas to see her folks…Terrible. She's become all stuck up and la-di-da now… but she's all fur coat and nae knickers and we all ken where she comes from and she'd do well not to forget it.*

Families, like all social structures, actively collude to keep secrets as they deny that which they choose to or feel the need to ignore (Zerubavel 2006). Pincus and Dare (1978) define 'secrets' in families as unconscious beliefs or attitudes which, through their general acceptance by succeeding generations of a family, come to perpetuate themselves in determining their responses and behaviours. If family members challenge a secret, the attitude of other family members towards it also seems to change, and the collusive system is broken as new facts and fantasies come into the open. But in ordinary decent hardworking respectable upstanding Scottish working-class families like mine—where 'keeping the peace' and 'hauding your wheesht' is encouraged—this is easier said than done.

Nana liked to say 'Let sleeping dogs lie'. Mum and me would nod and agree with the old saying 'Least said soonest mended'. Even if Mum and Nana worry that I am in danger of being or becoming 'something I am not', it is never spoken of. Instead we sit—Nana and Mum and me—in the featureless front living room of my little ticky-tacky house on its hill, happily chattering—ignoring the silenced magnolia-coated elephant that takes up residence in the middle of the room, blending seamlessly into the overpriced boxy walls.

'You Always Wanted to Be a Mother'

When I fall pregnant, I don't tell colleagues until I am almost twenty weeks and 'starting to show' and even then I determinedly refuse to indulge in idle pregnancy/baby chit-chat as I feign faux nonchalance and resolutely remain carefully poised in my professional 'it's business as usual' role. But I always wanted to have babies and be a mother and—behind the scenes—as soon as I fall pregnant, I am obsessed: I read endless books that tell me what to expect when I am expecting and what to expect when the baby arrives; I dangle my wedding ring from a chain over my stomach to determine if I'm having a boy or a girl; and I wait—impatiently—to feel the 'quickening' that confirms better than any scan that I have a new life growing, nestled, inside me.

Looking back at my twenty-seven-year-old tidily pregnant managerial self with the whole wide wonderful world of opportunities lying

paved-in-gold in front of her as she determinedly teeters along (with her growing bump) in high-heel courts and pastel mini-skirted suits, shuttling back and forth between her hometown and the city-centre bank headquarters where she works—I can see that she always already knew what my little-girl-self always already knew—and what Mum and Nana and Maw before me always already knew too:

'I want does not get'

You can want it all. Perhaps, with the entitlement and privilege that the career-girl money you earn brings, you begin to think you can expect to have it all. But wanting and expecting does not get… There is no such thing as having it all. As Nana liked to say… 'Something has got to give'.

Six months into my pregnancy, Mum and Nana—who, like Maw before them—have kept themselves busy knit-knitting as they expectantly await our new arrival—become increasingly vocal with their 'gentle' nagging as I continue to keep up my professional persona at work…

> *You're working too hard… it was different for us, we had to work all the hours god-sent to make ends meet but you're not even being paid for all that overtime! And you've not bought anything for that wean yet…You know that's a baby you've got growing in there – poor wee soul is going to come into the world thinking it's unloved because you've not bothered getting organised … never mind your work, that'll be there waiting for you! Some things are more important than your work – It'll all change when the wee one's here – you'll feel differently – you wait and see!*

To appease Mum and Nana (and to indulge my swollen-baby-belly-self!) I concede to be 'taken in hand' and I schedule a day off work to go 'pram shopping'. It is a Friday in mid-June. It is Nana's birthday. We do not know it but it will be Nana's last birthday. I smile now as I remember Nana determinedly test-driving a range of prams up and down the store. Nana was smiling—alert—her eyes mischievously awake. There is no hint of the woman she had been back in the 1970s, the '80s, before then too – *years before then,* Mum will say. But on her last birthday, Nana is not the woman my little-girl-self grew up alongside. There is no hint of the relentless 'nerves' that Nana lived with day in and out as her Valium-loaded body agitatedly rocked to-and-fro, chain-smoking, on a yucky

brown-velour chair, her crossed leg shakily bouncing up and down, terrified in case the van might come to take her away to the local 'loony-bin'. *Now you're fine, Mum. Settle down…* Mum would say to Nana. And I would agree. *It's OK Mum…Nana's fine, she's OK. You're fine, Nana, aren't you?* There's no hint of *that* Nana on her last birthday. That Nana disappeared when Nana 'miraculously' recovered and was restored to her 'old' self; when a new young doctor joined the practice and insisted Nana was weaned away from her decades-long Valium haze that like many other women of her time, supposedly settled—and definitely silenced—her.

Richardson (Richardson and St Pierre 2018) calls for us not to flinch from where the writing takes us emotionally or spiritually, and to honour the embodiedness and spatiality of our labours. But I do flinch. Like Mum, like Nana, like the long line of strong women before me, I am oft-inclined to support the supposed lulling-comfort of silence. Nana and Mum do not talk about Maw's death but I know now that she died—alone, in hospital—medically shamed because of her swollen-bloated body. Mum and I are there during the days before Nana dies a not-so-silent death. Nana howls and screams in fear and pain in the weeks leading up to her death. Looking back, in hindsight I see—again—that 'old habits do, indeed, die hard'. *Now—Nana—come on now* … I try to placate Nana and calm her down as she rants and raves on a morphine-induced high as she rakes over her life: unspoken, silenced grief, shame, lack, loss, poverty, disgrace, years of being looked down on… and now she is wild with pain. *Now…sssshhh Nana, what will people think?* … *Shush now Nana…*I try to settle her—I shush and silence her as I paper over the cracks on her crepey soft face with Yardley and rub cream onto her dehydrated atrophied hands. *Shush now Nana…don't you worry about it all. Will I put on a wee bit of rouge—get you looking good for your visitors?* I silence her. I put a lid on the box of her messy outpourings. I stop the rotting unsayable from leaking everywhere. I tidy her up. Make her clean. Make her respectable.

'You're Always a Wonderful Woman to Me'

Mum puts together a scrapbook in memory of Nana's life after she dies. She fills it with photographs and newspaper cuttings and titles it 'A Wonderful Woman'. As we flick through it together we laugh and agree that Nana was 'a character', Nana had a 'wicked sense of humour', Nana could rise—on occasion—'to start a row in an empty house'… *Nana was indeed the most wonderful of women.*

Later, when I flick through the scrapbook with my children, I point to a photograph with Nana staring with love into a hospital crib and I say to my eldest…

> *That's Nana and you…the only photo of the two of you together…Nana died just a few months after you were born but she got the chance to hold you before she died and oh, she loved you so…*And I turn to my youngest and say… *Nana died before you were born but oh, she would have loved you so, too… a wee girl…another one of us in the long line of strong women…*

The kids nod—bored. They never knew Nana. She is just a 'character' in a family story. Someone they never met. Someone they never knew. Someone they still think does not have the power to affect them.

> *You know…* I say to my youngest, hesitant because I know what I am about to say sounds like sentimental slushy rosy-tinted words…*even though Nana died before you were born and she never got to hold you, I kept the blankies and shawls she knitted when I was first pregnant and you got to wear them too.* She rolls her eyes, but I continue to make my point. *I never knew Maw because she died before I was born but she knitted for me when Gran was pregnant and I've been thinking that when I wore the clothes she knitted for me she somehow touched me because her fingers touched the wool… so in a way your Nana touched you through the wool of the shawls she knitted that I swaddled you in…*

It is a weak point and my youngest remains unconvinced, but it is not a moot point because I feel it and I know it. Perhaps I have always unconsciously felt it as a 'structure of feeling' manifesting as a pattern of impulses, restraints and tones (Williams 1977). Perhaps I have always

'sensuously known' it as ghosts from my past reach out across time and space—with no apparent rhyme or reason—to touch me. The gaps left within us by the secrets of others return to haunt us as they demand their due (Abraham and Torok 1994) and if we provide a hospitable memory, ghosts of our past can lead us towards what is missing and sometimes this is everything—sometimes this can be a concern for justice (Gordon 2008).

I come from a long line of strong women who skivvied after other folk and then came home to care for their own on the 'second shift' (Hochschild 2003). A long line of strong women who were the bedrock of the caring profession (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989). A long line of strong women who cooked—*Aw aye—Maw kept a guid meat house—not a penny to scrape together but there was food on the table.* A long line of strong women who cleaned—*Aw aye—Maw kept her steps scrubbed like the best of them.* A long line of strong women who laundered—*Aw aye—Maw's hands were red-raw with wringing but she was known for hanging out a braw washing line.* I come—it seems—from a long line of strong working-class women who in their social space—the social space that Skeggs (1997) argues I inherit along with their narratives—were unacknowledged, unappreciated and 'othered' because they had little economic, cultural, social or symbolic capital at their disposal. I come from a long line of working-class women who worked damn hard to make ends meet—to be accepted as decent and respectable—to not be looked down upon…I stare at my privileged doctoral-researcher clipped manicured fingers as I type—it does not matter where I go or what I write—I know the angst of class cannot be easily erased.

Conclusion: Writing the Old Old Stories

We 'freeze' stories and transform them into 'true' when we write them down (Plummer 2013). Memory cannot resurrect past time, because it is memory itself that shapes it, long after historical time passes (Steedman 1986). I do not seek to write 'the truth' of memory or the past. I write, instead, towards a naked 'poetic truth' that is always escaping because it is always somewhere else—out over there (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 1997). Nevertheless, as I write myself into this text, from the working-class world I have come

from, the academic and business worlds I am continually flitting-in-and-out of as *I* work hard now—in an inconceivably different way from my foremothers' efforts to 'make my ends meets', I am mindful that I write not into any old text or world or history but into my own personal world and into a family history that is rightfully mine to own or disown. Education and privilege offer the opportunity to walk away from it with a few simple 'deletes' of privileged-academic-researcher typewriting keys; but I am mindful of Walkerdine's (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989) mother who lurks—almost invisible with no history—in her kitchen. And I am mindful of the long line of silenced women I come from who have earned their place in my history. Skeggs (1997) calls for us to ensure we do not allow class to disappear from our academic agenda. I agree.

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12

‘Must Try Harder’: Anxiety, Self-Shaping and Structures of Feeling, Then and Now

Tracey Loughran

One Beginning

It is 2003. I am twenty-three and in the first year of my PhD. I have not written a word of the thesis and I have no idea where to start. I do not recognise it at the time, but I am in despair. I split up with my boyfriend of six years a few months back. He texts me several times a day and sometimes threatens to kill himself. I am living in a house share in east London, drinking too much and eating too little. I will never be as thin as this again, something else I do not realise at the time. I am miserably in love with a clean-cut, clever, American doctoral student who is kinder to me than I deserve, but who knows a train-wreck when he sees one and keeps his (friendly) distance. I also know a train-wreck when I see one and run into its path. I recently started dating a man—ten years older, pregnant ex-girlfriend, unsuitable in every possible way you could imagine, and then some. He introduces me to pills, coke and speed. I would be lying if I said I didn’t enjoy all this, but the after-effects are definitely not good, especially on an empty stomach.

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Because I am very taken with this man, who is handsome and charming, I end the affair I am having with another man who is committed elsewhere. We remain on good terms (for a while, at least). One day, I accidentally send a jokey explicit text meant for my former lover to my new boyfriend. I don't realise what I have done until my boyfriend replies. He has clocked my mistake. He will not pick up the phone when I call him. I am booked onto mandatory training for graduate teaching assistants, so I switch my phone off and head to the session. When I emerge after a few hours, I have multiple missed calls and texts. This time, my boyfriend picks up the phone. You knew I was at this training session, I remind him. Why did you call so many times? You have all those scars on your arms, he says. When I met you, you had scabs on your knuckles from punching walls. I was worried about what you'd do. Although I am clearly in the wrong, this makes me angry. I wouldn't cut myself over you, I spit.

Except, of course, eventually I do. A few months later, not long after we split up, I decide to get a full sexual health MOT. (I've been on the Pill since I was sixteen and haven't managed to get any of the men I've slept with in the past year to use a condom). In stirrups, skirt round my waist, the nurse can see the three horizontal cuts on each thigh. She is kind and says nothing, but I am not sure I have ever felt quite so humiliated.

Another Beginning

Somehow, I found myself once again curled on the floor, with sore red eyes and a damp face. I felt as though I had just emerged from a deep sleep with a fever, not quite knowing where I was and looking at the world through different eyes. But the scene was all too familiar by now and had been for a long time […].

I really didn't want to do it. I knew what all this crying was leading to and I protested against it, but this too was inevitable. At that moment I felt that I had to. Resignedly I went and took the razor from its hiding place. This razor was one of many. Sometimes I would open boxes and find razors I had put there months ago and forgotten about. They haunted me […].

I pressed the blade into a point near the inside curve of my elbow and drew it along the length of my arm, pressing harder as I went along. The pain felt

good […] The tight thread of tension in my stomach slowly uncoiled and I felt a rare sense of calm and acceptance of the situation. I had stopped crying and the tears that had rendered me almost incapable of movement only moments ago were now no more than an oft-played memory. The rain outside pitter-pattered softly, providing an odd comfort of a steady rhythm and soothing my bruised nerves and tender calm. I squeezed the slash on my arm, making the pin-points of red swell and stand up. A thin trickle of blood ran down my wrist and dripped onto my leg […].

I knew I couldn't go on like this.

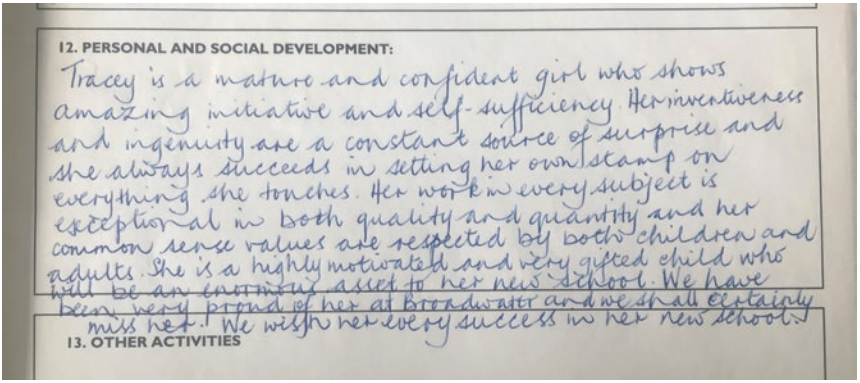
It is 1994. I am nearly fifteen. For a school English Language assignment, I hand in a short story about self-harm and suicide. It is written in the first person. In full, the teacher's comments read, 'Very well written. Your eye for detail is excellent'. I get an A.

A Final Beginning

It is 2016. My brother died a few months ago, at the age of thirty. We are all shell-shocked. Nothing makes sense. Nothing will feel normal ever again. My parents have moved house and my mum has been sorting out boxes of old stuff. She has put piles of papers into three carrier bags: one for me, one for my sister and one for my remaining brother. The carrier bags contain a bizarre assortment of documents: a vaccination card, childish drawings, letters home from school trips, Local Education Authority statements and school reports. I don't know why she is handing the evidence of our childhood back to us—doesn't she want the memories attached to her surviving children? I am in despair, and this time round I know it.

So my temper is already sharp when I start going through the papers. I soften, reading the report from my final year of primary school. Who wouldn't feel pleased? The teacher praises my 'outstanding' written work, 'well-developed imagination' and even my 'exceptional' grasp of mathematical relationships and good performance in P.E. (I had forgotten that I ever performed adequately in either subject). In the section on 'personal and social development', her writing gets smaller as she tries to make the

text fit in the box, and even then it overspills a few lines; it's clear that she really wants to write this.


12. PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT:

Tracey is a mature and confident girl who shows amazing initiative and self-sufficiency. Her inventiveness and ingenuity are a constant source of surprise and she always succeeds in setting her own stamp on everything she touches. Her work in every subject is exceptional in both quality and quantity and her common sense values are respected by both children and adults. She is a highly motivated and very gifted child who will be an enormous asset to her new school. We have been very proud of her at Broadwater and we shall certainly miss her. We wish her every success in her new school.

13. OTHER ACTIVITIES

Primary school report

Tracey is a mature and confident girl who shows amazing initiative and self-sufficiency. Her inventiveness and ingenuity are a constant source of surprise and she always succeeds in setting her own stamp on everything she touches. Her work in every subject is exceptional in both quality and quantity and her common sense values are respected by both children and adults. She is a highly motivated and very gifted child who will be an enormous asset to her new school. We have been very proud of her at Broadwater and we shall certainly miss her. We wish her every success in her new school.

I'm touched by her warmth, and for a moment the future is before me again, just as open and terrifying as at age eleven, when I gained a scholarship to a minor public school, along with a prize for exceptional achievement.

I turn to the reports from my secondary school. I am first bemused, then inflamed, then incandescent. A year later this bright, hard-working, resilient and popular girl had disappeared. Her marks were still good, her written work still impressive, but she was now 'reticent', lacked concentration and needed to demonstrate 'more determination and effort'. The form tutor's report at the end of the year read:

Tracey is often late for morning registration and has a high absenteeism rate. She should involve herself a little more in form activities and put forward her ideas; at present she is rather withdrawn.

At the end of the next school year, despite an overall placing for academic performance of second in form, and praise from several teachers, others still claimed that she needed to 'make more effort to participate in lessons', that she 'lack[ed] the determination required to overcome her difficulties', tended to 'remain uninvolved in lessons', and should adopt 'a more positive approach'. This time, the form tutor's comments got to the nub of the problem: Tracey 'still seems not to fully appreciate nor value all her opportunities at school'.

Put another way: *You don't belong here. You should be grateful we let you in, and you should put some more effort into showing it. If you're withdrawn, that's your fault, not ours; you need to sort it out yourself.* I can read the coded class prejudice now, and for perhaps the first time ever, I feel sorry for that girl. She was doing her best. She was only twelve. More than this, though, I am angry at her teachers. They had a duty of care to her and they let her down. She believed what they said about her, and then she took a razor to her flesh. She still wears the scars.

Except, of course, this is not entirely true (though that is not to say it is false). Correlation is not causation. It is unfair to blame depression, anxiety and self-harm on my teachers. There is no single cause for these complex states and behaviours. Certainly other factors in my upbringing, including family relationships, played an important part. (I will not discuss these factors here because it is not my right to tell a story where the other protagonists have no right of reply.) In my heart of hearts I don't truly believe that I ever had a chance of outrunning this deep sadness, no matter what other path my life might have taken. I come from a line of addicts, depressives, suicides. I do not believe in the genetic causation of mental illness, but I do believe that sorrow is in my blood. I see no need to square those two statements. We can live with contradiction, fluidity, indeterminacy, if we only resist holding these things up to the light.

Who Am I Now?

Why so many beginnings? To some extent, these are arbitrary starting points: snapshots at twenty-three, fourteen, eleven, moments frozen in time, staging posts in a process of becoming that has not ended. But starting the story in this way is also a refusal of the illusion of linearity, the lie that there is only one story to be told. A life moves forward in time, each step leading to another, consequence inexorably following action; but caught up as we are in the moment of living, we cannot possibly grasp all the contexts that make sense of what we do or leave undone, and everything that happens as a result. Looking backwards at a life, all we can do is try to untangle the threads, pick out (more or less) what happened and attempt to impose some order on our unruly pasts. Memory is not linear. It loops back upon itself; past touches present touches deeper past without rhyme or reason; its revelations and unravellings occur agonisingly independent of our will. There are rules about beginnings, but they are chaotic: a beginning is never arbitrary; it is never the only possible beginning; it is never entirely freely or consciously chosen; and it could lead to several possible endings.

So who am I now? I am, in Valerie Walkerdine's phrase, an 'educated working-class woman' (1990, p. 158): a woman born into and raised in a working-class family, who is now a highly educated and salaried professional. I am a historian employed in a plate glass university, a researcher but also an educator. These aspects of my identity are integral to my self-image, and they also determine the myths of the past that I choose to hold in memory. We all carry our childhoods around inside us, both as a past that shapes our actions in ways we cannot hope to understand, and as a distinctive internal image of who we were when young—knowing, of course, who we turned out to be (Steedman 1986, p. 128). My internal image is of a quiet child who read a lot, a daydreamer, someone who lacked self-esteem and faded into the background. Part of my response to reading that primary school report was surprise at the realisation/memory that at one point I was someone different: someone popular, confident and admired.

Who was I then? The daughter of indisputably working-class parents: my dad, a plasterer, the second oldest of eight children, born in England to a Northern Irish father who never lost his accent; my mum, who worked part-time cleaning or on market stalls when we were young, so that she was at home during the day, then worked her way up to become manager of a care home when I was a teenager. They had four children; I came third, the youngest daughter. We lived in south London until I was eleven, and that part of my childhood was very happy. I remember Saturdays at my nan's house, walking to the library, playing on our bikes or roller skates with other kids in the street. My parents were not part of the politicised working class, nor were they autodidacts, though my dad in particular clearly valued education. Neither had any choice about leaving school at fifteen (no one was going to keep them past that age), and so they were aspirational for their children. They exploited the avenues they understood. Scholarships and the Assisted Places Scheme[1] made it possible for three of their children to attend minor public schools. They would not have known how to game the state school system.

I never think of us as having been poor; unlike either set of grandparents, my parents had a mortgage, and in their own eyes this made them something like middle class (what that tells you about their outlook!). But aspects of the way we lived sound unbelievable, almost Dickensian, now. Lots of things came second-hand, used and bruised; chipped plates, clothes passed down through the wider family; there was a time when we didn't have a settee, and instead our living room sported a doctor's waiting-room bench (it must have been cheap). We didn't have central heating until 1993; I did my homework on my knee in the living room, sitting close to the electric fire, or my hands would get too cold to write. Coldness of this kind enters the memoirs of well-off people much older than myself as a relic of the 1950s; it doesn't belong in their recent past (Diski 2009, p. 56). I don't remember having a desk to work at until I was in my late teens, not even a kitchen table; with six of us living in a two-bedroom house, space was at a premium. None of these things

[1] The Assisted Places Scheme was the first education policy that Margaret Thatcher announced after she came to power in 1979. It allowed pupils to receive publicly funded and means-tested assistance to attend private (non-state) schools.

bothered me. I was happy in my family home and did not imagine the world being different, at least not for us. But what I made of education, and what education made of me, is impossible to understand without some sense of these socioeconomic circumstances.

My world is very different now. But one thing has never changed. I am the kind of person with ready access to an 'archive of the self', not just the bag of materials that my mum handed over, but the old school work, poems, occasional diaries, drawings and letters that I have kept. This means that I was, and always have been, the kind of person who holds her past close, cannot bear to throw it away, even if most of the time it has been boxed up and ignored. (Maybe that is part of being a historian?) And now I am also the kind of person who picks over her past for public consumption, appropriates it for scholarly ends. I don't know at all what that says about me.

Educational Journeys

So: let's trace the beginnings to their ends. What happened to the child, the adolescent, the chaotic young woman? There are lots of stories we could tell about her life. Let's start with the narrative of her educational and professional life; the story with a happy ending. These are the facts, observe them as you will. The child took up the scholarship and did well at school. She won prizes. She went to university, where she graduated with a first-class degree in History. She won more prizes. These included the award for best History First in the University of London, though because the prize was split between three people that year, she still thinks it is somehow cheating to claim this as a 'real' achievement.

Undergraduate Tracey

Her Masters (Distinction, more prizes) and PhD (passed without corrections) were funded by Research Council studentships. Two months after her viva she took up a temporary post at the University of Manchester, followed by a Research Council postdoctoral fellowship, and then a permanent position at Cardiff University. Her CV lists doctoral, postdoctoral and visiting fellowships; promotions; international keynote lectures; research grants, some for quite impressive amounts, employing other people. Out in the world, searchable in university library catalogues, there exist four books with her name on the spine. She is a high achiever. She is a success.

In some ways, this all came easy. I like understanding more about the world and articulating that understanding. If, during my education, I sometimes found particular assignments difficult or struggled to know what mark to make first on a blank page, then I also always found a sense of achievement and worth in filling those pages—and I always managed to fill them in the end. I panicked about whether I would be good enough academically, but in fact, I always was. None of the steps in this chain felt

inevitable at the time; every single one entailed a certain amount of agonising; at the same time, it's undeniable that simply in terms of temporal progression, the path to where I am now was actually remarkably smooth.

But then of course, the CV, library catalogue and university staff webpage don't tell the whole story of a life. It could be argued that these achievements also came at a high cost. On listing some of these difficulties, I'm surprised at how much I want to minimise them. In retrospect, I was clearly depressed as a teenager (but not, I tell myself, *that* seriously; I mean, it's not like I was ever hospitalised or anything). I had little self-esteem and ended up in relationships that were certainly not healthy (but not, I tell myself, *really* abusive: who doesn't, at some point, have a boyfriend who monitors her every movement, doesn't want her to see her friends or family, shouts at her if she comes home drunk, tells her she's fat?). Education drove me into debt, even though I was awarded successive studentships: I did not complete my PhD in time, and so had to live off my credit card for six months. I spent five years paying off the loan I took out to clear that debt, and some time longer than that paying off the Student Loan Company for financing my undergraduate studies (but, I tell myself, I was lucky because I got a job quickly and was able to get back into the black). My career drove me away from home, from people I loved and places I knew: away from London to Manchester, then to Cardiff, and from there to Essex (but, I tell myself, I met new people and loved new places; I lost London, but I gained a lot too).

I am who I am: here I stand, I can stand no other. If I am absolutely honest, the costs enumerated above do not really bother me, and I don't care to think about those things too much: the past is past. What does worry me—is that it's never done, this striving, this sense of having to be a bit better, of having to prove myself. At this point in my life, I am exhausted and I also don't know what is left without the striving. What would happen if I just stopped, retreated, withdrew? I can't imagine. This is a powerful statement about the extent to which I have not only internalised certain values (about education, about work, about effort), but to which these values are now at the core of my identity. It may also be the most enduring residue of my particular class and educational identity. In the late 1950s, Richard Hoggart traced the sense of loss, isolation and uncertainty experienced by 'uprooted and anxious' scholarship boys

(1958, pp. 241–263), attributed to their sense of living in two worlds and belonging fully to neither. Right through to the twenty-first century, we can trace similar feelings of 'oscillation, ambivalence, guilt and inauthenticity' (Reay 2017, p. 114) in the stories of other highly educated working-class people.

Among this bundle of emotions, the sense of constant striving is perhaps particularly prominent in educated working-class women's stories. This striving might be an inheritance of gender and class, rather than education. Carolyn Steedman recalls

> to know how my mother felt meant acquaintance with all the ghostly army of good women, scrubbing the Lancashire doorsteps until they dropped, babies fed by the side wall of the mill, bringing the money home, getting the food to the table, never giving in. I carry with me the tattered remnants of this psychic structure: there is no way of not working hard, nothing but an endurance that allows you to absorb everything that comes by way of difficulty, *holding on* to the grave. (1986, p. 107)

This drive to work can provide reassurance of a certain kind: 'Like going to sleep by contrasting a bed with a pavement, I sometimes find myself thinking that if the worst comes to the worst, I can always earn a living by my hands; I can scrub, clean, cook and sew: all you have in the end is your labour' (Steedman 1986, p. 43). But these calculations also reveal a real and enduring sense that at some point, in some unspecified way, all might be lost, and then survival will be the only option.

For Valerie Walkerdine, this striving is a product of the education and profession that separate her from her class background. She writes of 'always working, never stopping, for working was the way out, the only guarantee, the safeguard against the necessity to accept, to return, to give up'; she is haunted by the 'terrifying doubts that very soon they will find out that you have no talent' (Walkerdine 1985, p. 66). This constant need to work springs from the contradictions inherent in the life of the clever girl: 'To want to be clever is to desire to win. It is both to be different and to long for acceptance. To be attractive enough, to be clever enough, to have enough money […] But what if winning in one place is simultaneously always a loss?' (Walkerdine 1985, pp. 74–75).

These accounts of living between two worlds, of never belonging fully in either, and of the constant drive to work, to make secure what will always seem precarious, resonate with me. But there are also some differences between the stories of these grammar school girls, who grew up in the 1950s, and my own. Steedman acknowledges that 'only a few were allowed to travel through the narrow gate at the age of eleven, towards the golden city', but is nevertheless grateful that 'a benevolent state' bestowed on her the sense 'of my own existence and the worth of that existence – attenuated, but still there' (1986, pp. 122–123). I had no such sense of greater forces at work, urging me and those like me forwards and upwards (no matter how misplaced such a conception of social mobility). Instead, I was torn between feeling the bite of charity (the terminology of 'assisted place' underscoring the need for help) and awareness that, unlike most of my fellow pupils, I had *earnt* my place through academic excellence (with the concomitant knowledge that if I slipped, it could all be taken away). I wonder now whether, as a result, I oscillated between abjection and arrogance, holding within myself and as part of myself a peculiar blend of powerlessness and invulnerability.

The other difference between these accounts and my own is one of degree rather than kind. If never fully belonging is a common theme in the stories of highly educated working-class people, then the sense of separation, splitting and disassociation feels particularly strong in my own case. The summer I was eleven, my family moved from Tooting in south London to Worcester Park in Surrey. I had already gained my scholarship to the school in Streatham that my older sister attended; there was never any question of finding a school closer to my new home. Door-to-door, the journey took over an hour each way. I spent a lot of my adolescence in transit, literally between two worlds. I left behind the friends of my early childhood and did not find it easy to make others in a school where so many pupils came from such different social backgrounds to my own. The commute meant that I could not linger after school; it was not easy to visit friends, or for them to visit me. (I must also have been tired from all this travelling, which undoubtedly did not help with work or leisure.) Transit has also marked much of my adult life, and I wonder now if this is one of the ways in which my education marked me for what followed: the expectation of being in two places at once, the

inability to be happy either when split or settled. More than this, I wonder how much that experience of transit deepened a tendency towards dissociation, the capacity to detach from my surroundings—including from my own body.

Embodiment and Speech

We are our bodies; not *just* our bodies, but we always and inescapably see, speak, listen, touch, write, remember, live, within our flesh; with all its ragged histories, known only to us. Our bodies 'represent the shape of our sensual and sensate consciousness, the very heft and substance of our presence in the world. And as such they are fundamentally shaped not just by biology but by action and interaction' (Steggals et al. 2019). For a very long time, I despised my body so much that it did not even feel like an active hatred. I rarely thought about it at all. The knowledge of my ugliness, lack of fit, ungainliness diffused through my skin like water from a fine mist. These were facts, and like other facts I had to live with them. This pragmatic attitude co-existed with the sustained and intentional infliction of bodily damage to myself—punching it, cutting it with razors, stubbing out cigarettes on it—and it is bizarre now to think that I never connected this behaviour with hatred of my body. It was not a punishment of the flesh, but a way to cope.

I first self-harmed when I was thirteen, and it gave me clarity, control; the sudden sharp pain brought everything into focus, dissipated the unbearable grey numbness that sometimes crushed me, or else snapped the uncontrollable emotions that terrified me back into their box. For years after I stopped self-harming, whenever I felt overwhelmed I would slowly and deliberately imagine cutting myself: the first dig of the razor, the slow drawing over flesh, the terrible sweetness as the blood began to swell. These images never failed to calm me. It took years more before I really understood the visceral reaction of most people to deliberate self-harm: oh, right, that's what bothers them, I get it now. (And I have not self-harmed, at least not in that way, for more than fifteen years, but sometimes, even now, that understanding vanishes, and I yearn for a

more immediate and controllable pain, just as more than a decade after giving up smoking, sometimes I still long for a cigarette.)

All of this, once again, I take seriously and not too seriously. It's past, it's gone, it doesn't matter anymore. In 2017, the journalist and author Caitlin Moran, four years older than me and so part of my generation, appeared on Desert Island Discs. She laughed off the interviewer's question about her experiences of self-harm by saying, 'I mean it was the early 90s, this is what we did, kind of, we didn't have the internet then'. I immediately found this comment funny, recognised both the off-hand attitude and the reference to a nihilist strain in the pop culture of my adolescence, but less than a split second later felt personally chastised when Kirsty Young sternly interrupted to say, 'No, that's not true, Caitlin, it's not what people did, I didn't do that in my teenage years, many many people I know didn't do that' (Desert Island Discs 2017). Well, you're not wrong, Kirsty; but then again, what do you know about it, what gives you the right to judge?

At the same time, when I read that today, an estimated quarter of fourteen-year-old girls in the UK have self-harmed, more than double the number of boys of the same age, I'm shocked and worried (Marsh and Boateng 2018). This is very serious. What is it about being a girl, or being a girl in our society, that causes this inability to live in our own skins? And when I read that '[b]righter girls and girls from poorer families are more likely to be depressed by the time they enter adolescence' (Campbell 2018), I'm pricked by a little stab of recognition, and once again I feel sorry for that twelve-year-old who didn't know what her future held. But I'm also surprised; everything that felt so unusual, so pathological, so much part of myself, actually fits into a pattern of structural damage. My scars are not (or not entirely) my own; I'm a statistic. The determinism is comforting and offensive at the same time.

What is it, then, about being clever, working-class, *and* a girl, that heightens the risk of depression? The newspaper report cited above speculates that brighter girls 'have a much higher emotional reaction to things and they are constantly overthinking things', leading to increased stress. It also points to greater pressure to succeed at school, and the fact that some academically adept children struggle to make friends (Campbell 2018). Economic status and gender drop out of the picture entirely in

these explanations. Of course, research does exist on these issues (Hawton et al. 2001; Laye-Gindhu and Schonert-Reichl 2005). But the (partial) erasure of class and gender in this media account hints at the cultural invisibility of these clever working-class girls—or, more precisely, their abandonment. It is so easy to act as though these aspects of identity are merely incidental. This, in turn, should tell us something about why these girls feel the way they feel, and why they do what they do.

In trying to explain why I felt the way I felt, and why I did what I did, the fact of adolescence itself is important. But this, of course, is all tied up with education, class and the move from one school (one world) to another. I started my periods about six months before I started secondary school; I began to move into an adult body, or certainly a body that was not-quite-childlike, not-quite-mine, at the same time as I began to move between worlds. I knew about the mechanics of puberty—I had borrowed Dr Miriam Stoppard's *Every Girl's Life Guide* from the library several times—but nothing prepared me for the experience. (Now, as a historian working on gender, health and embodiment in the postwar period, I realise that very few girls ever feel prepared.) My body felt, and probably was, different to those of the other girls at my school, and in ways that I experienced as classed at the time: big, clumsy, greasy, in contrast to their smallness, healthiness and grace. I gravitated towards those whose class and bodies were also different. My three closest friends in my first two years at that school were all working-class, one white, one Black and one of Mauritian descent.

Of course, many adolescents of all genders, classes and ethnicities feel deeply uneasy in their bodies, at least some of the time. Where my experience might diverge, and again in a way that is shared by other educated working-class women, is the simultaneous discomfort provoked by the act of speaking (Walkerdine 1985, p. 75). At school, my accent marked me out. Language cannot help but reveal the speaker's loyalties, expressing solidarity with those who speak in the same way, and social distance from those who speak differently (Burke 1987, pp. 3–6). I did not want to change my accent, but nor did I want to draw attention to myself, and so I stopped speaking unless spoken to. I was not mute, but I knew about silence, about difficulties in articulation, about the inability to be heard.

Instead, I wrote my pain on the body: self-harm '*cannot help but communicate*' (Steggals et al. 2019).

Because I am educated, I can now put these feelings and actions into different frameworks of understanding. I know that psychogenic voice disorders—an extreme and unwilled manifestation of the incapacity to speak—are more common in women. I know that many physicians believe these disorders stem from feelings of 'anxiety, anger, irritability, impatience, frustration and depression', and internal conflict about speaking these emotions (Butcher et al. 1993, pp. 6–11). I know that among children, selective mutism is higher in ethnic minorities and immigrant groups, and that this is often explained as a result of the lower social status of 'home' languages or the sociocultural dissonance resulting from migration (Cline and Baldwin 1994, pp. 16–19). I know that self-harm is usually perceived as 'motivated by a desire to regulate feelings of intolerable tensions, sadness or emotional numbness' (Millard 2015, p. 1). I know that now, my history might be viewed by others as part of wider History, in which an 'epidemic' of self-harm became visible in the 1990s (Chaney 2017, pp. 214–226).

All these things I know. What surprises me is how long it took to learn to speak, even after I left school, even after speaking became part of my job. I think of myself now as a confident speaker: I know that even on a bad day, I can deliver a competent lecture; on a good day, I positively enjoy speaking, holding the floor. But in writing this chapter, I found/made two connections that genuinely shocked me. Looking through folders on my computer, I found a file of notes made in early 2014 for a workshop on 'Emotion and the Researcher'. I had written:

> Eventually, as I went through school, and A-levels, and a degree, and an MA, and a PhD, I learnt to speak again. Over years, I learnt how to make an intervention, to manage a lecture, to deliver a talk. I can do these things competently. But speaking will never be what I am really good at. I cannot organise the words, I can't put them in the right order, I can't respond quickly enough. The vocabulary that comes naturally to other people doesn't come naturally to me: I hear it in my head, self-conscious, awkward, and I can't say it without stumbling. When I do speak, when I am articulate, I know still that many people hear my accent, not my words: and what I'm saying must not be that clever, because I don't sound like clever people should. I note every

> glottal stop when I'm speaking and when I'm nervous and I miss one, I know I've gone down in everyone's estimation. I know enough not to really care; and I've always been chippy enough to think it's the world that needs to change; but still, everything I've built in my life has been predicated on being clever, and I feel at my most alone and my most misunderstood when I see an audience refusing to listen.

I recognise this version of myself, but I did not expect to find her in my recent(ish) past. Memory: it can't be trusted.

I am still untangling the other connection. It has to do with how that inability to speak at school seeped into all the other parts of my life, the damage it did, and how when I did find my voice again, it was in the context of work rather than personal life. It also relates to the profound sense of dissociation I discussed earlier, the swing between abjection and arrogance. If anyone asked me if I am confident, I wouldn't know what to say. In work? Well, yes. I'm a good historian, a good lecturer, a good colleague. My salary is obscene compared to the average household income, but taking my immediate colleagues as the relevant comparator, I certainly earn every penny of it. As someone said not too long ago, with a distinct edge of bitterness, I really don't suffer from imposter syndrome. And at home? No, not really. I find it nearly impossible to assert myself with family or friends if I am upset. I am actively grateful when friends take the time to see me. The last time a man flirted with me, I assumed it was a kindness on his part, to make me feel attractive. I don't really think about or register these responses; they don't bother me, as such; but they're there.

When I think about bodily self-hatred, voice and voicelessness, and the split between my professional and personal identities, elements of the story with which I opened this chapter make a different kind of sense. The barrelling between different sexual partners; the inability to insist on protecting my own sexual health; but, perhaps most tellingly, the ability to switch off my phone in the middle of an emotional drama and turn up to the training session for graduate teaching assistants. In the midst of chaos, work still has to be done; work is what keeps you going. Further back in my past, as a teenager, I lacked the ability to say 'no'; I was pathetically grateful to be wanted; some early encounters skirted the edges of consent. (But then, how can consent be given or refused if someone

doesn't know how to say 'no', if she thinks what happens to her body doesn't matter, if everything that takes place happens outside her anyway?) If these encounters left me sad and self-loathing, then I kept my emotions to one side until my homework was done, and I never missed an exam. I became silent through education, but that muteness eventually stained the rest of my life.

Things are different in some, many, most ways now. I have been married for nearly ten years, I certainly don't go in for self-abnegation to the same extent, and for the most part my emotions are less overwhelming. But when they threaten to engulf me, I sometimes show myself capable of a containment—a dissociation—that horrifies me even as I take pride in it. The day after my brother's funeral, I went to work and delivered a lecture on mourning in the First World War. Early on in the lecture, there is a quotation from Pat Jalland's (2010, p. 8) work on grief in twentieth-century Britain: 'Just as people were becoming accustomed to the survival of babies to adulthood, they suddenly had to face the mass deaths by violence of young adults, whereby children died before their parents, a complete reversal of the natural order'. I remember reading this line, and I remember thinking about my parents breaking down at their youngest son's coffin. But I didn't cry, and I got through the next forty-five minutes. After all, I am a professional.

One Ending

Before I had written a word of this chapter, I described its purpose to a friend. I spoke flippantly about the prospect of spending so much time with my teenage self, who I described as pretentious, annoying. He looked at me quite seriously and said, We shouldn't look down on our younger selves, it's cheap. It was meant kindly, but I felt chastened, and really, I agreed with him. Oh, I don't look down on her, I said, I mainly feel sorry for her. Oh, pity's fine, he said. We were both smiling. We spoke for longer. I wouldn't mind writing something like that, he said. Something reflective. But not to publish. There's always one image that sticks in people's heads. You can't control it. He's right, of course. At the same time, that's only part of the story. Feeling oddly embarrassed, I

explained that I took the feminist commitment to the concept of the personal as political seriously, and especially because my current work involves interviewing women about intimate details of their lives, I felt that I also had to be prepared to put myself out there, on the line, if asked. But that's also only part (the nobler part) of the story. There is power in speaking the 'I' and seizing control of the first person is a way of assuming power if you don't have it (Loughran 2018, pp. 256–257). Controlled disclosure is a way of keeping safe. No one can steal from you what you give willingly. This part isn't about feminism so much as sheer bloody-mindedness, that refusal to give up, the insistence on setting the terms of your own life.

This attitude, too, is shaped by class and education. On the negative side, being a working-class woman in academia, or anyone who does not quite 'inhabit the norm' (Ahmed 2017, p. 115), is wearying, and ultimately numbing. You have to speak twice as loud just to be heard. Some people, not necessarily consciously, resent you just for existing in that space. You have to push all the time, constantly impinge on their consciousness, just to do anything, no matter how simple. It tires you out, and when so much of life is straining, rubbing at a raw edge, making that phenomenal effort just to avoid going backwards, it becomes difficult to really care what people might think. You might as well put everything out there, face it out, turn their judgement into the active choice of your resilience. On the positive (?) side, education enables containment, a certain kind of distancing that also makes these things manageable. You can step outside yourself and understand how your story fits into other frameworks, bigger structures; shaping your experience into a narrative in some measure depersonalises it; you can, on a good day, turn that numbness into anger and passion, and get things done. Seeing everything through an academic filter: this is what it means to be educated, for education to be the central fact of life. What an ambiguous legacy, though.

Other Endings?

Endings are as arbitrary as beginnings, but with this crucial difference: all the beginnings that might exist are already there, back down the track, somewhere to be found if only you can follow the threads far enough; the possible endings, on the other hand, if not infinite, are numberless and cannot be glimpsed with certainty. The future is open. That eleven-year-old, fourteen-year-old, twenty-three-year old—she had no idea where she would end up. Truth be told, she couldn't really imagine a plausible future. This was not a symptom of depression, but perhaps one of its causes. If you are working-class and in the process of being educated, how can you know what the end of that journey looks like? Is there anyone in your life who looks like someone you might become? For me, there was not. I took one step at a time, pushing blindly forward, trusting that at some point the future would be here, and that when it came, I would need the makings of a life around me. I still find it very difficult to imagine the future, but maybe such imaginings are not always necessary to build a bearable present. I think that girl might be quite pleased with the life she made.

She might be less happy with the past I have given her. A year ago, five years ago, ten years ago, I would have written this past in other ways. I was different then; how could my past be the same as it is now? I might have told other stories: my dad taking me to the library, or to Foyles bookshop to spend my birthday money; wanting to be like my sister and to wear the same uniform; my older brother meeting me at the train station after school; helping to teach my younger brother how to read. In another year, five years, ten years, I will be in an as-yet-open future, and I will tell different stories again, in ways I cannot now imagine. Everything I have written here is as honest as I can make it, but it is still a snapshot taken at a particular moment in time. Carolyn Steedman ended the story of her childhood by asking for 'a structure of political thought' that would 'recognize what has been made out on the margins; and then, recognizing it […] consign it to the dark' (1986, p. 144). I am asking for something less, and different: for readers who will accept the truth of what I have said here, but also its provisionality; who will refuse linearity and embrace

the fluidity of our pasts as well as our futures; who will allow, as they reach this arbitrary ending, that somewhere out there, the person who wrote these words has moved on; that she is no more, and that she is still becoming.

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13

Single Indian Woman; Very Accomplished but Can't Make Round Chapatis

Meena Rajput

I'm a woman and therefore obviously 'less than'.

I'm thirty-eight years old. Approaching haggard, untouchable status, in other words.

And single, living in my own one-bedroom apartment in Brixton, London. Obviously, morbidly lonely and unhappy, then.

I'm British Indian, of immigrant descent. I don't fully belong to either culture.

These attributes promise a life of discrimination. They place you right at the bottom of the pecking order.

Do you feel sorry for me yet? Have you already decided that my story will make you angry with my parents and my 'culture' for treating me so horrifically? No need, fortunately. I'm not a victim. I'm successful. I've experienced positive, diverse and inclusive relationships that helped me to achieve what I've achieved. There have been struggles, of course there have. Still are. But fewer than my parents experienced.

When I agreed to share my experiences here, I had just returned from an expedition to the Antarctic. I was part of a 'Greenpeace' campaign to

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stop the krill fishing industry exploiting and destroying the Antarctic Ocean. With thirty-five other crew members, I helped a team of marine biologists gather evidence of vulnerable marine ecosystems from deep beneath the ocean, in order to present a strong case for protection of the Antarctic Ocean to CCAMLR (the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources) and to the UN.

While there, I also learned how to weld a steel pole to the external structure of the submarine to enable our videographers to capture unique, 360-degree footage. I climbed up the side of an industrial krill fishing vessel to hang a banner, which read 'Protect the Antarctic Ocean', in front of world news journalists from CNN. I worked with the BBC to film a short piece about being a female British Indian activist in order to inspire others. The BBC warned me in advanced that the title '*I didn't want to get married so I went to Antarctica instead*' would be 'clickbaity'. I cringed, but they were right. Over half a million people viewed the short film. I did interviews with BBC India and The Times of India. Guess what the journalists asked first? Of course!

'Meena, you're such an inspiration! But tell us—why don't you want to get married?'

Some of my friends were outraged that this was all the media cared about. I just rolled my eyes. I retain a deep affection towards those who remain so tightly bound by social and cultural limitations. It's been a long time since I stopped fighting the fight and accepted that, whether I like it or not, there are 'expectations' of me—expectations set by intangible forces strengthened over centuries. Our cultures place expectations on us all. *I* must be beautiful, *I* must get married, *I* must have children and *I* must be subservient to quite literally everyone else for the rest of my life. This is the social, cultural and institutionalised definition of 'success' *for me*. Any additional accomplishments are just garnishes.

Issues of class and social mobility are complex for me as for all children of immigrants. Intersections of class, gender and race didn't play out in an upward linear trajectory for my family. Settling in England meant taking a step down for my parents. My dad grew up in Kampala (Uganda). His father, my papa-ji, had been taken to Kenya from his home in Punjab (India) by a close family friend. This family, who we are still close to today, cared for my papa-ji. When it was time, my papa-ji and daadee-ma got married. Their firstborn was my father, Ashok Kumar Rajput, who

grew up in this extended family full of boys, big hopes and dreams. My grandparents had two more sons and six daughters, all of whom returned to India with my daadee-ma whilst my father followed papa-ji to Leeds in England. With limited English, my father started his 'O' Level exams, studying hard, holding his own in numerous racially provoked fights. He would shrug them off. 'That's life', he'd say on his way to a BSc Honours Degree in Pharmacology. He started work with a government-funded research programme on Leukaemia.

My mother? Asha Rajput was the fifth child out of eight brothers and sisters. They grew up in a rural village in Punjab. In those days, it was normal to go to the toilet in the fields, which would make most westerners turn their noses up. But in her reminiscences, life was a lot of fun. The family eventually moved to Old Delhi and settled in Ranjeet Nagar, a busy district where even today the houses are open-topped come rain or shine, sacred cows roam the unpaved streets and the local market is buzzing with activity till all hours of the night. I could still feel the beautiful energy that they created there when I visited the family home. My mother was the only daughter of all the five girls to go to university. With her parents' whole-hearted approval and support, she graduated with a degree in Sanskrit and then trained to be a teacher.

Both my parents belonged to the Sunar (Goldsmiths) caste. Neither high nor low. Not particularly sophisticated. And historically known as thieves (It's said that a goldsmith will steal away a bit of any gold you give him to restore or fix). But both my parents' fathers were known to be exceptionally hard-working men and highly regarded in society. And so the two families united. My father travelled from Leeds to Ranjeet Nagar to meet my mother, who served the chai during the 'viewing'. Whilst sitting amongst ten other family members and their prying eyes, Ashok and Asha were encouraged to converse with each other, for just a moment.

'Do you want to come and live in England?' my father had asked.

'Vhat?' my mother had replied, turning away in shyness.

The next day she heard her father, pita-ji, humming his favourite tune from the street on his way home. She knew then that it had been agreed that she would marry my father and move to the UK. The two dutifully accepted their fate and made a life-long commitment to each other.

My mum wanted to work. She was an intelligent woman and had dreams of a high-class life. Determined and ambitious, she learnt English

and eventually got a job as a chief product inspector in a factory. She fell pregnant after a year of being married and then again a year later with me. First came the son—congratulations all around! Second came me. My father took many phone calls expressing disappointment. But he was overjoyed because a girl was exactly what he wanted. They gave my brother and me names that were easy to pronounce.

My father was made redundant only a few years after we were born. He couldn't find another position in pharmacological research, and in any case the poor salary was a deterrent now that he was a husband and a father. Life in England was not what they'd imagined. My mother had dreamed of a high-class life and a respectable job. My father had dreamed of great status as a man of intellect. But they rolled up their sleeves, determined to climb back up the social ladder. He worked as an insurance salesman, a policeman and sometimes a taxi-driver at night but he was a very intelligent man and grew frustrated by the limitations to his ambitions that he experienced. Eventually, my parents bought a corner shop in Leighton Buzzard. Owning your own business is highly regarded in Indian culture but corner shops owned by members of minority ethnic communities represent a stereotype for some members of the 'host community' that enables them to classify these business-owners as inferior. My parents worked incredibly long hours to make a huge success of their business without accruing debts, enabling them, over time, to invest in property and move to a middle-class neighbourhood. We seemed to be liked and well respected by our white friends and neighbours there to such an extent that my father entrusted care of the shop to some of them to enable us to take a well-earned holiday one year. Imagine the shock, then, when something raised my mother's suspicions on our return and CCTV showed them filling their bags from its stock. Even as a child, the sense of betrayal was immense and proved long-lasting.

There Were Always Angels to Catch Me

I am four years old in Leighton Buzzard, a white town about forty miles north of London, where little happens. We own 'Raj Stores' and a cigarette-vending business called 'Raj Vending'. We live above the shop.

My parents work from 7 am to 9 pm, seven days a week to take care of my brother Arun and me. He and I spend our days stacking shelves, 'reviewing' new cartoons, helping elderly customers with their shopping, roller skating and learning to ride our bikes on the concrete of our back garden—and when Mum isn't looking, raiding the cereal boxes for the free toys buried inside. The trip to the Cash & Carry is the highlight of our week. Dad pushes us around on the bouncy trolley and sends us off to find certain items. We slide around in the back of the van as my dad turns corners and goes fast over the bumps. We are all together, always, in the traditional way that my parents know from their own childhoods.

But things are different when I'm away from my parents and the shop.

I'm at preschool, surrounded by 'English' kids. I am punished for not wanting to drink milk like the other kids. My beautiful mum, dressed in fashionable western clothes, explains that the taste of cold milk makes me retch and vomit. She requests another drink. So, while the other kids drink their milk, I am sent to the toilets to drink water on my own.

'Meena is too special to drink our milk so she can go to the toilets to get some water'.

I am four years old but I know something isn't quite right with this scenario. I often feel confused. In the shop, customers' children are happy to play with my brother and me. But in the school playground, these same children pay me little attention or avoid me altogether.

A group has gathered to play a game, so I ask if I can join in.

'Sure', says a boy. 'We're playing Kiss Chase. Ready? 1… 2… 3… Go!'

I run and run, in this direction and in that, laughing as I go. Am I playing the game correctly? I turn around. I am running around all by myself. The other kids are all at the other end of the playground. I am excluded. I feel humiliated. I am learning day by day that I am different and unwanted.

Another year goes by and I am sitting on a bench in the lower school playground in the middle of a bitter icy winter. I am wearing a stiff brown woollen parka. I struggle to pull the toggles through the loops. It makes me cry, all alone on the bench, little brown frozen fingers too cold to fasten my uncomfortable, uncomforting coat. The other kids are in their groups, with their brown or golden hair, pale skin and rosy pink cheeks. I try to join in with them but Joanna Lee is calling me 'poo' again and this

stops the other girls inviting me to play. Embarrassed and 'caste out', I go to find my brother to ask if I can play with him and his friends. He explains that they are on a spaceship saving the universe and that this is a boys' game, not a girls' game. I am very sad and turn to go. Arun pauses the intergalactic spaceship battle and gets into a huddle with his friends. He beckons me back and proudly announces that I am to be the tea-lady on their spaceship. I am not overjoyed. But I appreciate his effort and I need some friends so I follow him to my 'tea station', a brick wall. I am to face the wall and pretend to make tea while the boys resume their battle. I am under strict instructions not to bring them tea while the battle is on. I am only six or seven but my own battle is starting.

For the time being, however, I ditch the stupid tea-lady role I've been assigned and am back on the bench. Deflated. Sad. Life is more fun and people are friendlier in my shop world. The dinner lady rings her bell to summon us indoors for lunch. The school-dinner kids served by the plump, friendly, grey-haired dinner ladies, and the pre-packed lunch kids all run inside to eat together. I don't follow the others inside. I sit silently on my bench, with my red Rainbow Brite lunchbox on my lap, my fingers freezing cold and tears slowly rolling down my face. My brother is heading in but stops and says he was delayed by the galactic battle. I wonder if he's been watching to see if I am ok. He takes my hand and walks me to the dinner lady ringing the bell.

'Please, Miss, can you take care of my sister? She's crying because she's very cold.'

The dinner lady takes my hand, walks me to the canteen, passed the queuing children who stare in bemusement. Through the lunch hall we go, straight into the big school kitchen. My superhero dinner lady asks the other ladies to open the large oven doors as she plops down a stool for me in front of it.

'Our little Meena is freezing cold and needs a bit of care. Let's get her warmed up.'

I am in safe, welcoming, caring hands. I wipe my blurry eyes and smile. The other kids can piss right off.

Sometime after that, our teacher Mrs Rothwell hears Joanna Lee calling me 'poo' again. Joanna Lee sobs pathetically as she is scolded and moved to a different class. Permanently. Her turn to be shamed. I

somehow feel sorry for her. But I am well chuffed with Mrs. Rothwell. Another superhero. Among the cruel ones who populate my childhood, there are angels who catch me. I am learning to focus on the good rather than the bad.

'Why Do You Have Ginger Sideburns?'

I am ten years old and we have moved to a big house surrounded by woodland in one of the most sought after locations in Leighton Buzzard. These days, we spend lots of time with my aunties, uncles and lots and lots of cousins. There is lots of love, laughter and togetherness. I am having fun but my family life is all Indian and my school life is all white. I am learning a lot from both.

My parents are fully focused on working hard to achieve the status they desire. They have their business, they are loved across the town, their kids are well behaved, well presented and doing well at school. I am an A-grade student but it is not school-work that preoccupies me; it is how different I am to the other girls. I am wearing my white shirt, green tie and knee-length grey skirt and Morwenna asks why I have hairy legs. I look down at my legs. I look at hers. I look at all the other girls' legs. She's right. I have hideously hairy legs.

'I don't know why', I say.

The painful weight of embarrassment collects in my chest and throat. I can hear blood pumping in my ears. That evening I ask my mum if I can shave my legs as all the other girls do. She refuses outright.

'No! If you start shaving your hairs they will come back even worse!' she cries out.

My brother comes into the room.

'Please, Mum, let her shave her legs. All the girls and boys laugh at her.'

She concedes. I am allowed to shave my legs, but only up to my knees. The next day, a few boys point and laugh at my shaved legs. And that painful feeling returns. It gets worse. I have a swimming class. I stand at the edge of the pool in my swimming costume, exposing my half-shaved, half hairy-legs to my class-mates who don't hide their laughter. I'm desperately trying to figure out why I am the only one again with this

problem. Is there something wrong with me? Am I actually a boy? I don't know that when I am a grown-up I will want to reach back and squeeze this little me in the tightest of hugs.

For now, though, I fast-forward to age thirteen where I am sitting in Assembly at the Upper School. The headmaster is droning on while I am busy scanning the hall desperately trying to rid myself of the mortifying realisation that I am the only girl with sideburns. Why am I always the only one like me? I ask my mum why I am so hairy.

She chuckles, not realising it is eating me up inside. 'You take after your *bhuas*!' (my dad's sisters).

She introduces me to *bon jolen*, a hair bleaching cream. We smother my face with it. It stings so much my eyes are watering. At school the next day, I feel relieved to be more like the others. But within the hour, my dear friend Morwenna asks:

'Why do you have ginger sideburns?'

Later, as I sit opposite Terry Mitchell, the good-looking boy who all the girls fancy, Stacey Bolten bellows out:

'How comes you have a ginger moustache today, Meena?'

It doesn't stop. Why do I have hairy arms? Why do I have a hairy farmer's neck? Why do I have hairy toes? The PE changing rooms are a nightmare as I contort myself to avoid exposing the rest of my body. Morwenna introduces me to deodorant. After a trip to India, I tell my mum my head itches. She thinks I'm being rude about her home country. It's Morwenna who points out that I'm riddled with nits. All in all, I fail to make the swan-like transition the other girls are gliding through. I'm trying to work it all out in my head but I have absolutely no point of reference to help me through this excruciating experience. On the one hand, I am under pressure to be a good Indian Girl; on the other, it seems that I must make my body more like those of white people in order to be treated equally. Where are the people who look like me? I see Moira Stewart and Krishnan Guru-Murphy on the television news—but why do they sound so 'posh'? It sounds so unnatural. I vow never to conform like that, never to become posh in order to appear higher in status or class or to get a 'good job'. I won't lose my identity, my individuality, my creativity, my 'difference'. But being pulled and pushed between my Indian and my 'British' culture is a constant tension in my life.

What I do find is a group of friends—the unconventional sort—who give me a sense of inclusion and belonging. Of course, there's Morwenna with her quirky humour and her curly ginger hair to match (or what she insists on calling 'strawberry blonde'); Katrina who comes from a complicated working-class home and ends up living with her grandparents. She's super academic, articulate and doesn't tolerate fools; and Davina-the-rebellious-diva, who has joined the school after choosing to leave an all-girls private school. The popular girls desperately compete with Davina for the boys' attention. Davina needs to do very little to win. Our group offers amnesty to the other rejects who come and go.

My personality and confidence begin to flourish. My white friends open my eyes to what more I can be beyond the restrictions of my Indian culture. We talk about boys, music, films and how annoying our parents are. But the gap between our different cultures grows. They are allowed to do much more than I am—parties, alcohol, holidays, fashion, make-up, sleepovers, cinema, shopping trips on the train, music concerts. Later my mum will tell me that she just wanted to preserve my reputation and protect me from danger. When I am fifteen years old, for the first time, she lets me stay out with my friends till 11 pm. It is such a big step for her to surrender her only daughter to a culture so very different to hers; one she sees as more liberal, more independent and much less caring than her own. But Arun is alongside me, giving me guidance, gently nudging me in the right direction, distracting my parents from the angst they feel. He is a carbon copy of my dad: quiet, no time for drama, intelligent, a believer in equality. He never gets into trouble, is popular at school, a good student. People love him and take his advice. He does his own thing, is good at maintaining boundaries. He is the perfect brother. Still, it doesn't stop me starting to vocalise my feminist views at home, pointing out that it isn't fair that he's treated differently to me, that the expectation of helping my mum with the cooking and cleaning falls only on me, that I am still not allowed sleepovers at friends' houses yet he is, that he receives bigger portions of food than me (regardless of my mother's justified defence that, as our mother, she knows exactly how much I eat versus how much my brother eats). My brother says nothing. He knows I am right but he also knows how to protect his own self-interest!

I protest to the wider family, too:

> 'If you don't make our boys do any housework, they will grow up lazy and spoilt and they'll make terrible husbands—is that what you want for me? A terrible husband?'

My mum and my aunties aren't having it.

'*hai bade',* they say. 'Here she comes, the big headed one' or 'Don't try to be so clever'.

So where does 'hai bade' get you?

I get very frustrated. My dad tries to settle me back down.

'Making a fuss isn't the way to go about these things', he tells me.

I think he intends to convince me to be more obedient. Instead, his words of wisdom accidentally encourage me to figure out the art of diplomacy as a way of getting what I want. But not before a series of educational setbacks that become little epiphanies on the road to my later choices in life.

Like the work I spend weeks producing for my GCSE Art, which my mum is looking forward to framing after it has been marked. My teacher—a white, bohemian, frustrated artist—is amazed by it and asks if she can take it to show other teachers. I feel proud and say yes. Weeks before the GCSE examiners are due to come in, I ask her for it back. She says she has no idea what I am talking about. I should not blame others for losing my own work, she tells me. I am gobsmacked. My mum is outraged. But we do nothing.

Like my Biology 'A' Level project, when I want to develop and test a theory about the links between smell and memory. My biology teacher, a white, miserable and scruffy man in his fifties, renowned for returning our homework stained with scarlet wine-glass marks and stinking of cigarette smoke tells me that this 'isn't proper science'. He refuses to help me. He washes his hands of me. My final grade does not match my achievements during the year.

Like the saga of my UCAS form.[1] My parents want me to have a good career so I am pushed towards medicine, pharmacy, law or accounting.

[1] Application form for university.

That's all they know. I am more interested in topics related to individual and social behaviours. I don't know they might be called Sociology or Psychology and no-one is able to point me in this direction. It is the day I am due to hand in my UCAS form. My friend Kelly asks to see it. When she's read it, she rips it up right in front of my face.

'You don't want to be a pharmacist!'

'No I don't'.

She takes my hand, leads me to the library and plonks a bunch of university books in front of me. Together we search and search until we come across degrees in media, culture and social behaviour, which will accept the poor results I am expecting. I go off to study Media and Culture studies, which I later change to Marketing and Design. (Kelly—another rescuer!)

At university I establish a great group of friends. Sophie went to Gordonstoun (Prince Charles' old school). Timmy has a tennis court in his back garden. Jo's family own several horses. Regardless of our backgrounds, we are all looking for freedom. I am a natural at my studies; there are vocational prospects *and* room to develop my creative talents. It is a win-win situation. For the first time, my teachers are able to nurture my abilities and help me explore my interests further. My friends become my family and my relationship with my actual extended family start to break. The cousins I spent so much time playing with as a child are focused on getting married and having children. My aunties and uncles find it hard to understand my choice of career. My attempts to talk with them bring accusations of snobbery. Or irrelevance. There's still only one question of real import. You've guessed it.

'When are you going to get married?'

It's no good explaining that marriage still isn't important to me. Since I am still not interested in finding a partner, I am a bit of an outcast. My parents claim not to be embarrassed by me but it's clear they aren't particularly proud either. My mum gloats about my clever female cousins who 'cook wonderfully tasty subjee and chapatis for everyone' and 'clean the whole house!' She comments on their beauty and tells me to make more effort with my appearance. She isn't quiet about how much she hates my non-girly style either. And both my parents regard my field of study in higher education as *puhteh kaam* ('silly business'). They aren't

being nasty, but they have no idea what my game plan is. They are disappointed: from where they are standing, I am not taking life very seriously. As ever, my dad opts not to intervene and goes with the mantra 'You'll learn from your own actions'. In the interim, we enjoy being father and daughter. Mum is *much* more vocal. I feel hurt and manipulated. She wants me to fall into line and I reject this with all my might. These are our most troubling years as mother and daughter. I feel frustrated and isolated all over again but rely on the incredibly strong support from my friendship group. I am following them to a land of far greater opportunities and prospects.

A week before graduation, I'm told by my two white male lecturers that I've achieved the highest mark across the university that year, just 0.24 per cent short of a 'first'. I learn later that three of my white male friends and two white female friends have had their grades inflated by as much as 2–3 per cent. Still, I am to be awarded a Prize. The cheque for £100 I receive turns out to be thanks to some corporate sponsorship the university receives. I feel less pride now but I say nothing.

I stay on to do a Master's degree. By accident, I start working in a snowboarding shop. A whole new decade of opportunities opens up. I learn to snowboard, wakeboard, surf. I start cycling, running, climbing. I explode into a world of sport. And I travel—a lot. Life is fun and I am living it to its fullest. I am doing things no girl in our family had ever done before. In London, I move with Sophie onto her family's boat in Chelsea Harbour, among all the celebrities and footballers (even if our boat is not a yacht but an old converted Dutch boat that sticks out like a sore thumb—as do we!). I have an amazing group of strong, independent and driven white privileged female friends. I become UK & Ireland's Brand Marketing Manager for a Global Action Sports Brand. I am interviewed by magazines, invited to be on an expert panel for BBC One's 'Young Apprentice', I am part of a team supporting two British Snowboarders get to the Winter Olympics in Sochi in 2014.

Despite excelling in my career and frequently being the one to advise the company directors on strategy and vision, I struggle to ever be promoted to a more senior position. The industry is macho, hugely sexist, and only the men are promoted and placed in leadership positions. One manager even told me to 'use my female assets' to influence a colleague. He wasn't joking.

Sadly it's here that my lack of understanding and awareness of discrimination and intersectionality means that I accept blindly what is happening. I'm too busy being distracted by all the unimaginable opportunities from a broadened horizon that are landing on my lap.

For my family, I am still doing *puhteh kaam*. Yet surprisingly, and very unconventionally, my dad encourages me to continue down my path and take risks.

And if I talk about changing jobs or setting up my own business, he says,

'Try it. If it all goes wrong and worst comes to the worst, you just come home to your dad.'

My brother also remains my biggest advocate, reassuring me that I am skilled, talented and making all the right choices. Just go headfirst into the void. It's the women in my family who still consider me to be unsuccessful. All because I am unmarried and show no interest in making chapatis. My marital status is all that anyone talks about at home. I am saved to some extent by my younger cousins. Feeling inspired by me, they act as a barrier, speaking in my defence. But the battle of the two cultures is at its peak. Authentic and non-authentic aunties (those I didn't even know) set up date after date with random Hindu Punjabi dentists, accountants, doctors, lawyers. 'Nice Indian Boys' that comply with my caste and vice versa. It takes just minutes into a 'date' to see how intrinsically sexist they are, and it's clear they have no experience of the wider world and are still firmly embedded in 'traditional' Indian culture. The more guys I date the more apparent my estrangement becomes. I have gone way beyond any future I could ever have imagined for myself. One by one my cousins are getting married and I am 'getting left on the shelf' or 'running out of time' because I am being 'way too fussy' and will 'end up regretting this later on in life'. My answer that I simply want to meet the right guy doesn't wash. Only my dad is quiet on the subject, continuing to place all his trust in *kismat*.

'You shouldn't force things like this', he tells my mum in front of me. (Mum assures me that behind my back it's a different story). I can see he is deflated. What dad doesn't want to see his daughter in the hands of a respectable, responsible and kind family man? Yet, despite his own wishes, my dad continues to join my brother in deflecting a lot of the fear and pressure that is coming my way, which helps a great deal.

It is Susie, Sophie's school friend from Gordonstoun, with whom I go travelling all over the world. Privileged and slightly eccentric, she didn't have a 'proper job' for a long time but now she's working in research for a global environmental organisation. As an environmentalist and idealist, she believes anything is possible and projects this attitude to the rest of the world. To begin with, I think she's a bit naive and deluded—that her privilege causes her to have no idea how the world operates. But after ten years absorbing her world-view, I too start to form idealistic values. My outlook changes completely. I leave the commercial sector in favour of volunteer opportunities at 'Womankind', a global women's rights NGO, and at 'Orchid Project', an NGO working to end female genital mutilation. After six months of trying to get my foot in the 'third sector' door, a paid data-entry job comes up at 'Greenpeace' and my brother tells me to go for it. After three months, I am given the role of Supporter Communications and Engagement Manager. I am starting right at the bottom again. I am also like a fish out of water. I feel intimidated by all the 'intellectuals' around me. Campaigners make plans to sue governments and make demands of corporations. Scientists and investigators prepare reports and evidence. I don't understand anything so I exercise humility, get my head down and learn. I engage with every campaign coming, I train to be an activist and join small protests. I learn that I too can make demands and ask for better, not just for 'Greenpeace' but for myself. Over the years I find my voice and learn to express my interest in socially and culturally constrained behaviour and how to effect social change. My passion is recognised for the first time in my life. I am given the space and support to explore my interests in a Greenpeace context. I become the Diversity and Inclusion lead, the Leader of the People of Colour group, and also the Manager of the creative network. I've somehow ended up doing the very thing I dreamed of as a young student but had no idea what it was, let alone how to get there.

What am I seen to be doing during my journey through this exciting and challenging new world? Just *puhteh kaam* again. But this time the family quietly indulges me because I have an Indian boyfriend. Everyone is waiting with bated breath…

Reflections of a Single Indian Woman

Understandably when I was growing up, my immigrant parents were busy building a new life to support us all. They didn't know what to expect when they decided to raise a family here. They didn't really understand how being the only non-white kids at school would impact us. They simply applied the same rules that were applied to them and everything seemed fine. But the lack of diversity and inclusivity in my learning environment was antithetical to principles of equality and this has left a continuing legacy for me. Who knows how things might have turned out in a more diverse schooling environment and with more supportive teachers? Would an 'A*' instead of an 'A' for Art have made any difference? Would getting a 'C' instead of an 'E' for Biology, or a '1st' instead of a '2.1' degree have led me in another direction? Would I have felt able to tackle the injustices I experienced had I occupied a more privileged position? Wouldn't I have actually needed to? Or have I got this far because of the resilience I've built up through years of proactively working around injustices.

I am in awe of how bold Kelly was on my behalf. She came from a privileged family; one that sits around the kitchen table, parents guiding their children through education and career choices. One that appreciates the arts as well as the sciences. One whose children can take a year off to travel—because they aren't striving to survive, to 'better themselves'. She lent me some of her privilege that day. She taught me to be bold, unafraid, to go out there and get exactly what I want—even if I hadn't a bloody clue what that was! And at university, it was my relationships with upper/middle class people that gave me the courage to break free from a culture I experienced as constricting—and to not be afraid. Quite unknowingly, they did that for me. And then in my twenties, my privileged friends empowered me to go and explore and broaden my horizons as much as possible. Being included—being allowed to be who I am—has given me the space I need to educate and 'activate' myself. I am no longer paralysed. What I have done for myself is to maintain a healthy relationship with my parents and my family.

When I was younger I fought as hard as I could against swallowing whole others' expectations and against getting into line like a good Indian girl. Was this 'clever'? There were many, many times I bashed my head against the wall for relief from the immense distress these pressures would cause me. And then I asked myself 'What will happen if I disobey?' The answer was always clear. 'Nothing terrible'. I knew that my parents wouldn't disown me. Because they know I have a point? Maybe. Because they love me? Definitely. I knew, what's more, that something even greater would happen—not just for me, but for those around me. I gripped the purity and truth of my intentions tightly. I followed my instincts. I had a lot to prove. The bar that had been set for me and others like me was far too low.

My parents bore the brunt of my rebellion. It was tough for them to see their daughter dangle so close to the edge of a cliff. My dad knew there was no stopping me so he would close his eyes, ears and mouth and put his trust in *kismat*. He would act as a mediator when my mum and I fought: he reminded me that she loved me more than anything in the world and that fighting with her wasn't very nice; he reassured her that this was my fate and that pushing me would only drive me further away. I know it killed him every day to see how his *bhola* was going down such an unconventional and risky path. Did he agree with my principles or did he simply not have the strength or will to fight me?

The privileged backgrounds of my university friends constituted a very different environment to the one I grew up in. The Indian culture teaches us to obey authority, never to question it, never to ask for more—only to work, work, work—but not to play. However, I realised my friends were aware of opportunities that I didn't even know existed—including sports, leisure activities and the arts—and they had the time and the money to access these. They weren't afraid to stand up to those with power, feeling entitled to make demands on their own behalf. I watched and learnt. Significantly, their families provided a level of security that enabled them to take risks. *They* provided *me* with a supportive network that helped me to deflect the fear and pressure to conform that was coming from the women in my family and to take risks on my own behalf. My mum tried with all her might to persuade me to be the good Indian girl that everyone wanted to see and not hear. I have always fully appreciated that she has felt her own pressures to succeed—in the eyes of our culture, as a

good Indian mother. And by committing to each other and working together through our battles we eventually stopped fighting each other. She now distinguishes between me being a child in her care and me being her accomplished adult daughter, and I now go to her for advice and wisdom.

The difference in me now is that I understand that as a woman of colour, who is either consciously or unconsciously perceived by her peers to be of lesser intelligence, education, class and social status, I have to strive much harder than anyone else at making my voice heard. At making my expertise acknowledged. At progressing my own personal and career development. The trick for me moving forward is to learn how to navigate through life to reach my potential, without draining my energy by trying too hard to prove my worth.

The 'Greenpeace' venture was my first time on an expedition, let alone on a ship and let alone sailing the most treacherous seas on Earth. It was my first time to the Antarctic. It was my first time working with a team of scientists. It was my first act of protest as a climber. It was my first major experience with the media. It was my first attempt at building something using hardcore power tools. None of this felt exceptional for me. It was a culmination of everything I had ever fought for. Still, instead of showing interest in the purpose of the scientific research or the skill involved in my actions, most people ask,

'How did your mum react to all of that?'

They ask this because they know I'm a thirty-eight-year-old single British Indian woman. They know it's not expected of me. Not just by my culture but by wider society. Will there always be extremely low-bar expectations of determined 'clever girls'? Or can we inspire others by achieving the unachievable? Regardless of class, 'race', gender and education, how can we raise the bar high enough to accommodate the unconventional path? We shouldn't have to strive so hard against the odds.

When I returned home from the Antarctic, my body and my mind finally collapsed and I was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. I was bombarded with advice. I was told I needed to stop aiming so high or doing too much. I needed to settle down. I needed to stop pushing myself. I was getting 'old'. But I knew that what was happening was necessary. I have spent thirty-eight years fighting to break the mould that I was born into. It was hard work because I had no role models. Doing it

all alone and for the first time, against the advice of those who loved me, was an uphill battle with a gale-force wind whacking me in the face.

Some years ago, I felt intuitively that my dad was unwell. I felt incredibly desperate to get married. I would sit and cry with no idea why. They say the body starts grieving early because it knows. Tragically, he passed away in 2015. We are still recovering from the pain of losing him. Just a week before his passing, he was reflecting on his life and feeling sad for having sacrificed his own dreams. Together we walked through his life and I pointed out how immense his accomplishments had been. I think this gave him some reprieve but I still empathise deeply with all that he had sacrificed. The last words he ever spoke to me were,

'Don't force things with him, *bhola*. He's not worth it.'

Till his last breath, my dad put his own dreams to one side—this time, of seeing his only daughter getting married—to teach me to be strong and follow my own dreams, not the dreams of others. After his passing, I felt a shift in my energy and boldness. I engaged in more extreme protests to stand up for what I believe. And despite my getting arrested, to everyone's surprise my mum was very proud of me (because there was a half-page photo of me in the newspaper and, as she says, I 'looked pretty'). I've appeared in the media multiple times since, which never fails to make my mum swoon with pride; I'm mentoring other people of colour; and I'm finally fulfilling my dreams of working to positively influence social behaviour and break down barriers. I seem to have adopted my parents' work ethic while proving that my non-conventional path has given me the upward social mobility they aspired to. And my mum has joined my brother: now they are both my strongest allies. Even the dramatics around my marital status have waned, let alone any conversation of me marrying an Indian doctor. The only way I can interpret that is that I have achieved a social status which is acceptable to my family—without the help of a man!

Class or social status doesn't matter to me. It's just one of the many challenges I face being a thirty-eight-year-old Single British Indian Woman. I have spent my whole life rejecting the notion of being unconsciously bound by any limiting, archaic or toxic social concepts. I have 'leveraged' the British class system and the Indian Caste system in order to break down barriers. I have acquired the confidence of my privileged friends to dream big for myself. I have also come to understand that I can make demands in order to achieve those dreams, regardless of my position

in society, age, ethnicity or gender. It's my aim now to pass this on to others and help them to aim much higher. By embracing me as I am my mum has also recognised that more opportunities might be open to *her* and has been able to mobilise the resources that the more privileged take for granted. That film the BBC made? She appeared in it and stole the show! Never in her wildest imaginings would she have thought that possible.

For me right now, it's time to rest and recuperate before moving forward and putting all that I have learned about being a 'Clever Indian Girl' into effect. But the best moment of my life so far was last week when my mum said,

> 'I wish your dad was here to see what you've achieved. He would have been so happy and proud to see how his *bhola* has made his name for him. He would even have laughed as he said "*My bhola has done all this – but she still makes wonky chapatis!*"'

Meena with fellow Greenpeace activist Jo Patterson, drawing attention to the health implications of diesel pollution and large corporations' responsibilities for it by occupying a lighting gantry with thousands of confiscated VW diesel car keys at the import centre in Kent, October 2017

14

"But you're not *really* foreign": An Autoethnography of a Working-Class Canadian "Passing" in England

Kristin O'Donnell

Introduction

"But you're not really foreign". Those words still ring in my ears. What was meant to be a reassuring message from a friendly colleague signalling me as an accepted member of an in-group left me feeling like a rank outsider. The cognitive dissonance inherent in that single phrase was a key moment of both recognition and de-recognition. Here they were telling me that I belonged, and yet I was left feeling more alienated from my fellow working-class colleagues than I had ever experienced before. What transformed this seemingly friendly comment of inclusion into one that made me feel profoundly excluded and uncomfortable? The year was 2016 and it was only weeks away from the referendum on whether or not Britain should leave the European Union (EU). This story is about my experiences as a working-class young woman migrating from Canada to the UK, but it is also about much more than that. Drawing on both memory work and autoethnography, this chapter is an exploration of my own lived experience as a young working-class Canadian immigrant in

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twenty-first-century England as a lens to interrogate wider notions of class belonging and how it is inflected by race, gender and education.

My position as an immigrant is one of privilege as much as it is one of structural challenges. As a newcomer in England at a time of heightened tension over migration between 2004 and the present—a period which saw many Baltic and Eastern European nations join the European Union and which reached a crescendo during the 2016 Brexit campaign—my ethnicity (white), my position as a native English speaker and my country of origin's status within the Commonwealth has mitigated my foreignness. Instead of being conceptualised as distinctly "other", I often occupy a position of "not-quite-different" but also "not-quite-the-same". I am often able to pass in both the working-class and middle-class surroundings I have found myself in, but always occupying a position on the boundary of belonging. My story is one of double migration, class and country; one always slightly obscuring the other and making me hard to place. It is an identity I relish but a liminal and often unstable one. Through a series of reflexive vignettes, I chart my own life course as I adjusted from a self-conscious working-class Canadian to passing as a cosmopolitan member of a community of middle-class academics and creatives. Through my status as not-quite-different and yet not-quite-English, my experience of living in England offers a broader perspective on class, race and identity as relational markers, and the inclusions and exclusions that arise from such categories.

From a very early age, I was told I was a clever girl and that this would take me far. I grew up in a family of six children, five of us being girls, and our parents always told us that we could do any job we wanted. Our gender was never something that would hold us back as long as we got a good education. I secured a place on the academically selective International Baccalaureate programme at the local high school, but I was more interested in winning attention from boys than teachers and failed to apply myself to my schoolwork. I went from being top of the class to near the bottom. My grades were good enough to get into university but not high enough to secure a scholarship. My family thought of university as a place you went to learn in order to get a better job, not just to learn, and I decided that it wasn't worth taking out student loans when I didn't really know what I wanted to do for a career. After graduation,

most of my clever friends moved away and I worked in retail for a year, saved up all the money I could and moved to England. My arrival in England was a moment of class becoming for me. Growing up, I never thought much about class. Canada thinks of itself as a relatively classless society and lacks many of the more obvious markers of class-status so prevalent in England, so it was here that my class awareness began to slowly emerge, through interactions with middle-class creatives and academics. I became acutely aware of class when I decided to go to university in my late twenties as a mature student and this only intensified during my time as a post-graduate.

I view my route to "middle-classdom", as Jackie Goode so aptly puts it in the introduction to this volume, as a mixed one. A combination of the fickle nature of my personality creating an innate desire to learn; meeting encouraging people at the right time; access to a selective educational programme; the reckless courage to pack up everything and move abroad at nineteen to start a new life; and countless other moments of chance and decision led me there. However, tidy categories of "working-class" and "middle-class" identity don't neatly fit my own lived experience. Nevertheless, I have felt both the constraints and benefits they offer at various moments and in different circumstances throughout my life—particularly since I moved to England—and it is these moments of discomfort, and the insight they can offer on questions of race, class and gender in twenty-first-century England, that I explore in this chapter.

Memory Work and Reflexivity

As belonging is primarily a subjective and affective experience, I have turned to memory work combined with the "strong reflexive" practice (Harding, 1991 cited in Berg, 2008, p. 215) as a way of examining the contrasting circumstances of working in a supermarket during my master's degree and undertaking post-graduate research involving mixing in increasingly cosmopolitan and middle-class spaces. Although I initially sought to focus on questions of class and gender, reflecting on my own experiences as a young working-class immigrant in England led to the realities of my own white privilege emerging again and again. The

intersection of these various dimensions prompted me to explore "research strategies that address racialization as a white majority position, rather than race as minority positions" in an attempt to destabilise such categories (Berg 2008, p. 214). By combining memory work and autoethnography, therefore, I aim to illustrate the complexity and impact of these intersecting categories on feelings of belonging and experiences as an immigrant. Central to feelings of belonging is the concept of "passing", defined as a "discursive, embodied-material and affective process" which allows the immigrant access to the privileges of the dominant ethnic group, becoming accepted as "one of them" (Lapiņa 2017, pp. 58–59). As Lapiņa (2017) observes, "feminist intersectional scholarship recognizes the researcher as a situated, partial, embodied, knowledge-producing subject" (Lapiņa 2017, p. 59); further, memory work privileges affective responses to trace how "mediated positionings emerge through everyday interactions and social processes" (Lapiņa 2017, p. 60). Following her use of feminist epistemology, therefore, I too seek to highlight how "the invisibility of whiteness in the West has increased potency as a technology of domination in establishing racialized hierarchies" (Lapiņa 2017, p. 58).

Why England? Gendered Migration

I moved to England in May 2004, at the age of nineteen, to be with my English partner. At that time, as a young Canadian "love migrant", I felt that I faced little discrimination. Canada, with its reputation as a friendly nation coupled with a thriving economy, excellent social welfare programmes, world-leading education results (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2000) and historic links to Britain through the Commonwealth, is a nation often thought of fondly by the British. Indeed, one of the first questions I am faced with when people find out I am Canadian is "Why would you want to leave Canada to come here?" And thus, my first interaction with many people is an intrinsically gendered one, constructed through my relationship with my husband, a well-educated artist. When I first arrived, I was keen to mark myself out as Canadian, wearing a small maple leaf badge on my lapel, and happily telling anyone that would listen about my childhood in the

Rocky Mountains. As a young working-class woman, I was acutely aware of the gendered stigma of immigrating for love and in order to avoid negative judgement, I would tell people that I came to England on a working holiday—a sort of gap year, with all its middle-class connotations—rather than that I had met my husband on the internet. I felt generally welcome in England but when I reflect back on my early experiences, I see instances where the borders of belonging were constantly patrolled and policed.

Examining Englishness: What Is Belonging?

It is worth taking a moment here to consider what is meant by "English" and why I have chosen this particular category of identity over "British". Firstly, and quite simply, during my time in the UK I have only ever lived in England, and not Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Secondly, and more significantly, "English", with all its pastoral connotations, indicates both a cultural imaginary of an Arcadian idyll and normative whiteness. Distinguishing between the two terms, Raphael Samuel (2012, p. xii) points out that "British" highlights the imperial realities of the history of the UK. Its modern-day usage is often associated with hybridised or explicitly racialised identities such as "Black-British" or "Asian-British" or is used to minimise difference when speaking about the four nations that make up the UK. In contrast, "English" is a far more restrictive category and one that has become increasingly important to consider in the wake of devolution in 1999, and more recently, Brexit. As Dodd and Colls (2014) note, "'Englishness' is by no means the defining quality of those living in the territory that has come to be England, but a concept that has been made and remade throughout history, expressing itself through existing symbols and ideas" (p. xi). It is not enough to simply live in England to be regarded as English; it is a discursive category with conceptions of race and language at its core. As the dominant ethnic group, whiteness is implicitly at the heart of English identity. Indeed, it is telling that equal opportunities monitoring forms often carry categories such as "white English" but there is no such equivalent for Black or Asian people living in England, who are given the choice to identify as British, but not

English. Furthermore, when considering the UK's response to the EU, England also emerges as a distinct entity requiring separate analysis. Both Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU, with 62.0 per cent and 55.8 per cent, respectively (BBC News 2019). The referendum on Britain's EU membership was extremely divisive and raised urgent questions about who belongs, and subsequently who is excluded, in Britain.

Kathy Davis and Lorraine Nencel (2011) note that

> …belonging – the experience of feeling of "at home"– cannot be separated from the national imaginary of a specific collectivity. It is intimately linked to how membership to a particular community is defined and to how this community constructs boundaries between those who are part of it and those who are not. (2011, p. 479)

My arrival in the UK coincided with the 2004 European Union enlargement which saw ten new countries gain access to "freedom of movement" allowing EU citizens the right to live and work anywhere within the EU. But newcomers like me who are native English speakers, from countries perceived as having historic ties to England as a so-called mother country, are often embraced as well-integrated members of society. However, the question of belonging was very much at stake in the era of then-Home Secretary Theresa May's "hostile environment" towards immigrants. Under the 2010 Conservative-led coalition government a range of stringent measures were introduced to limit immigration, including language requirements and income thresholds. These policies have a disproportionate effect on those in more precarious positions than me. Nevertheless, the necessity to obtain a Biometric Residence Permit when I already had Indefinite Leave to Remain not only represented a significant cost to me as a student on a very low income, creating financial hardship, but was a clear message to me that I was foreign—and that foreigners must be tracked, recorded and logged as potentially threatening bodies. This "reminder" made me acutely aware that with net migration to the country rising steadily—from 13,000 in 1992 to 268,000 in 2004—immigration had become a key political issue in the UK, as it had in much of Europe (Vargas-Silva and Sumption 2018).

Over the fifteen years, I have lived in England, immigration has been a particularly contentious issue and central to debates surrounding Britain's EU membership and its impact is felt at a deeply personal level through everyday experiences of discrimination.

"Simple" Everyday Interactions

In Canada, I had done odd jobs baby-sitting in the neighbourhood from as young as twelve and worked part-time, mostly in retail, from the age of fourteen; it is very easy to find such employment. On arriving in England, I was taken aback at how difficult it was to find even an unskilled job. I put this down to the fact that there were simply more people and fewer jobs, but I reflect now on the fact that my experience of these difficulties coincided with newspaper reports of fear of Eastern European economic migrants (Preston 2004). I could not get so much as an interview in my first month of job hunting in an upmarket Kent town. Was it a coincidence that my maiden name is Ukrainian in origin? In exasperation I started going into shops and asking to speak directly to the manager. Within a day I was interviewed and offered a job on the spot. There is certainly historical precedent for an attractive young white woman being accepted as a "non-threatening" immigrant. In the post-war era, Britain was badly in need of migrant workers to rebuild the country and turned to those displaced by the war, primarily from Eastern European countries, as a potential pool for workers. Linda McDowell (2009, pp. 25–26) highlights how young, white females were actively recruited through the European Volunteer Worker scheme, demonstrating how race, health, youth, beauty and fitness made these young women attractive immigrants. She charts how these white Europeans were often preferred over Black English-speaking migrants from British colonies, even if they often spoke little or no-English. In 2004, it would appear that race was often not the only variable at play, and that linguistic ties made me a more attractive employee than many other immigrants. This early recollection of mine, of both exclusion and privilege, based on my own particular brand of "foreignness" prompts me now to look more closely at other everyday processes of boundary policing I have encountered.

Although I have spent over fifteen years (almost half my life) living in the UK, my accent invariably marks me out as foreign. Davis and Nencel, writing about their own experiences as white American immigrants to the Netherlands, highlight how subtle practices of "border policing" are employed to mark out even the most well-integrated migrant as "foreigner". They cite the "Where are you from?" question as a marker of not just polite curiosity, but also as a policing mechanism that patrols the boundaries of belonging (2011, p. 476). This very question and the affective response it provokes in me paradoxically highlights a sense of not-quite-different and not-quite-the-same that I believe is highly inflected by race. Further vignettes offer illustrations of these experiences.

While working at a supermarket checkout, I was asked the "Where are you from?" question by almost every new customer I met. At the time this felt like friendly curiosity and for many customers it was clearly a way of trying to establish shared experience through linking back to their own fond memories of holidays (or their aspiration to one day visit Canada), or telling me about their own family members that lived there. On further scrutiny, it seems to me that my own unreflexive response to this question is born out of my privileged position as a white native English-speaking migrant.

In fact, reflecting on my responses to this recurring question from new people has revealed a number of discursive strategies I have employed to emphasise my own sense of belonging in England. These range from stating that I am Canadian (and therefore a member of the Commonwealth with its historic ties to Britain), which was almost always followed by stating how long I have lived in the country—as if to say "I've been here long enough to earn the right to be considered part of the collective 'we' of England". And then, depending on the context, I sometimes mentioned that my grandfather fought in the Second World War and spent months training in England before his deployment, and a further six months recuperating here after he was badly injured. Through appealing to my family's literal blood sacrifice during the war, I was subconsciously drawing on a powerful sense of British identity surrounding the Second World War. As Benedict Anderson (2006) has pointed out, nations are "imagined communities" with war memory often at the heart of the national imaginary and a sense of belonging. At other times, I

would appeal to class-based sensibilities, explaining to those I perceived as more middle-class customers that I was studying for a Master's degree, as an attempt to generate sympathetic connection and to break down barriers of difference through cultural sameness. Through mentioning that I was a university student, and therefore implicitly a respectable sort of immigrant, I was justifying my own sense of belonging. But I never felt I had to do so in relation to my ethnicity. I feel compelled now to say that in sharing these reflections on my own experiences of the need I felt to justify my belonging, I am nevertheless very much aware that my position remains one of privilege. I do not seek to trivialise the struggle of those from minority ethnic groups. Indeed, I wish to draw attention to the ways in which this question and my affective experience of it are inflected by the politics of integration, through which, by virtue of my unmarked skin colour, I fit the dominant normative representation of English identity as white.

Belonging During Brexit

Before the Brexit referendum I never really felt "foreign".

The referendum campaign was deeply divisive, often along lines of race, class and education. Ipsos MORI post-referendum polling suggested that "younger, more middle class, more educated and BME voters chose to remain; older, working class, less educated and white voters opted to leave" (Skinner and Gottfried 2016). The area I live in voted to leave the EU by a majority of 54.9 per cent. My personal experience of the Brexit campaign was largely coloured by my experiences in two highly class-based environments: working part-time in a supermarket with predominantly working-class colleagues and my academic interactions during my master's degree. Most (but not all) of my working-class colleagues expressed "Leave" sympathies. In contrast, most of my academic colleagues strongly backed the "Remain" campaign.

During the referendum campaign, the conversation in the supermarket staffroom was dominated by Brexit and was primarily centred around immigration. By this time, I had been working at the supermarket for four years in a highly visible role and felt well-liked and respected by my

colleagues. In contrast to the pressures of academic life, working there felt like a safe environment where I could easily excel at my job. I felt secure. During this time, I would often enter the canteen in the midst of negative conversations on Brexit and immigration. I would intervene to remind my colleagues that I too was an immigrant and I was usually greeted with one of two contradictory responses. The first was something to the effect of "But *you* work", highlighting a paradox in the discourses that surround fearful responses to economic migrants coming to England and "stealing" jobs and resources from the locals. Instead of being constructed as a threat in a competitive low-skilled job market in a town with high unemployment, the fact that I worked was lauded by my colleagues as a marker of my own integration. It was a signal of our shared values of self-sufficiency and hard work, indicating that I was not a threat to the nation's resources by relying on public funds like the so-called maligned "benefit tourists" (McNeil 2014).

The other response I was often greeted with when confronting my colleagues over their desire to leave the EU due to immigration—"But you're not *really* foreign"—is much more complex to unpick. This response was clearly delivered with affection and the intention of making me aware that they thought I belonged in England, but it had a profoundly alienating effect. What I heard in this sentiment was "But you are white and speak English as your first language, so you are one of us". Indeed, "but you speak English" would often accompany this response. This stood in stark contrast to what I perceived as the broadly pro-remain viewpoints espoused by my largely middle-class academic colleagues and I found myself struggling to relate to my fellow working-class colleagues as I interpreted the messages of inclusion they extended to me as a stark statement that others weren't welcome. Indeed, one of the most high-profile images produced by those within the Leave campaign at the time provided a graphic illustration of the fact that white European migrants were not at the centre of the cultural imaginary of the threatening migrant: the infamous and highly controversial "Breaking Point" billboard launched by then-UKIP leader Nigel Farage, claiming that "the EU has failed us all" depicted a queue of almost exclusively non-white migrants and refugees (Stewart and Mason 2016).

The highly divisive impact the EU referendum had on British society was something I observed at a personal level. In the aftermath of the vote to leave, incidences of racially motivated hate crime increased (Schilter 2018). In over fifteen years of living in England, I have only ever been aggressively marked out as different on two occasions, one of which I experienced as directly arising from the Brexit referendum. In the weeks following the referendum, while at work at the supermarket, I observed two young English men racially mocking an Asian customer in front of them in the queue to pay, ridiculing his accent and laughing. Feeling a moral obligation and duty to intervene and bolstered by the security my workplace provided (both figuratively and literally), I asked the young men to stop. On being challenged, they feigned ignorance of the racist nature of their comments. I pressed the matter. I said they knew what they were doing was racist. They claimed that it was "just banter" and that I wouldn't understand as I "wasn't English". As I became aligned with the perceived "foreigner" in this situation, my otherwise accepted status of "belonging" as a white Commonwealth citizen was erased.

Education as Class Transformation and Global Citizenship

My accent serves as a marker of my difference but how this works is highly dependent on the social environment I find myself in, differentiated not only by ethnicity but by class. In the supermarket, the shifting parameters of my national and ethnic identity came into play in the encounter with the customers in the racist incident, but it is my working-class identity that is mobilised by my need for employment there—a point of identification for my working-class colleagues. In academic environments too, it is a class that comes into play but in a rather different way. Here, my accent serves to obscure my working-class background for my middle-class colleagues, enabling most to see me as middle-class-like-them. But despite years of insecurity and attempts to hide my working-class roots, their "accepting" responses prompt an urge in me to re-assert my working-class origins. Why? I puzzle myself. Why do I feel the need

to mark myself out as different in this way? Is it an attempt to demonstrate that despite what I perceive as the numerous structural barriers, I have made it against the odds? Is it my way of justifying my own continued feelings of insecurity—that I feel that the PhD I am undertaking is a struggle and that I've had to work harder to get here than others—literally working twenty-plus hours a week at a supermarket alongside my studies, just to pay my bills? What's going on here? Well, a paradoxical mixture of things, it seems, which rise up to confuse and confound me. Take issues of "representation", debates about who can speak for whom. There are occasions when some academics from working-class backgrounds actively flag up this aspect of their identity in order to "disqualify" middle-class academics, researchers, artists and other practitioners from researching the experiences of those from the working class. My own research has in the past involved a focus on the 1984 UK Miners' Strike. My dad is a miner and it is a topic which I feel strongly personally and experientially connected to, as he too went on strike in the Canadian mine he worked at. This has not saved me, however, from being effectively silenced on occasion by other powerful working-class voices who, unable to place me through my accent, make erroneous assumptions about my class-status.

My position has changed significantly since my arrival in 2004. I am now educated, culturally middle class, and integrated within English culture. At a recent post-conference dinner I attended with a group of postgraduate students, one declared that "We are part of an international educational elite" and to an extent that is true. My doctoral funding has afforded me the opportunity to do things I never could have done without it. I am welcomed into events at private members clubs; I have opportunities to present my research internationally, and move within these spaces in relative comfort and ease. It is perhaps the degree of comfort I *have* achieved that motivates me to highlight my recognition that my privilege and inclusion comes at the expense of others' exclusion.

Conclusion

As my own autoethnographic narrative illustrates, concepts of belonging become doubly complex when gender, class and national/ethnic identities intersect. Moreover, my own story shows how the lived experience of "foreignness" and "belonging" is variable and, set within structural and institutional systems of inequality, are also relationally constructed through everyday interactions; and how difference for someone like me can mean both inclusion and exclusion. Following Davis and Nencel (2011, p. 484), I argue that:

> It is not the recognition of difference that is, in and of itself, problematic. Rather, it is what is done with this recognition afterwards that transforms a simple question or comment into a policing mechanism. The recognition of who we are is the prerequisite for inclusion, while the reminder of what we are not is the condition of exclusion. (p. 484)

My individual experiences of belonging or not belonging, highly privileged and subjective as they are, nevertheless enable me to address wider issues of societal inclusion and exclusion rooted in gender, race and class.

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15

‘Untitled’

Motsabi Rooper

Fears

Starting to write a chapter for a ‘book’ involves throwing off some quite basic storylines that have followed me from childhood. Ones that I have been taught I should adhere to yet deny. As I sit here before my computer screen, my fears manifest in an urge to busy myself with a million other tasks that would allow me to avoid returning to the pivotal memories I carry with me and what returning to them may involve.

Returning involves admitting to myself that not I am yet able to completely shake off the loneliness and confusion I felt growing up as the child of a Black working class[1] father and white middle-class mother,

[1] Like many of the terms I use to identify people in this piece, the reality is more complex than the term suggests. When my parents met, my father was working in the Anthropology department of Wits University as a research assistant and translator (taking post graduate students into the Black areas). He was one of the very few Black people who worked in the university and along with his former wife (a primary school teacher), was considered part of the emerging Black middle class there. At the time in South Africa, because of racial segregation, people didn’t think in class terms and Black people were just ‘Blacks’. Like many of his generation who experienced the Soweto upris-

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whose worlds and experiences briefly collided but never joined. It involves confronting the anxiety I felt to 'keep up' with the world of my mother and my fear of not being able to do so sufficiently—due to some kind of innate lesser-intelligence or un-deservingness due to my Blackness. It involves acknowledging that part of me still sees the world through the eyes of a child and is unable, yet, to fully separate myself from the socially constructed scripts that I struggled to reconcile my identity with. It also involves admitting to myself that I am *not* an outsider when it comes to living at intersections of race, gender and class in my experience of education. What enables me to write at all is the idea that perhaps this was not, and is not, my fault.

The truth is, that I experienced education as a brutal contestation: between the world I was taught to see and the world I experienced; between acceptance and rejection; between being 'middle class' and being 'other'; between being 'Black' and passing as 'white'; between being 'clever' and potentially 'stupid'; and between many other binary definitions that never seemed to fit properly.

Education was about my mother anxiously passing on her class privilege and my father's attempts to abdicate his history, cultural heritage and ultimately his very presence, in support of it. It was about my internalisation of socially constructed hierarchies, stereotypes and segregation and my inability to navigate them in a way that felt right.

Education was about evidencing to my mother that she had produced a 'bright' daughter who would be accepted in the same schools, jobs and spaces she laid claim to. It was about trying to demonstrate to my father that I could be accepted into the spaces that his childhood in South Africa taught him were meant for 'whites only'.

For me, education was about the loneliness and ostracisation I felt navigating spaces that I felt I had no right to be in as a person of colour. It was about learning to pass as 'white' in a bid to become acceptable and accepted in the eyes of others and myself in classrooms, in uniforms and

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ing, he was a supporter of Black Consciousness who mainly saw himself in relation to the freedom struggle, identifying as an 'activist'. He came to the UK as an undergraduate student, completed a degree in Anthropology and went on to work in a housing project for ex-offenders. When I asked him about class for the purpose of this piece, he explained that over the years he has come to both see himself and identify as 'working class' in UK class terms.

in playgrounds where I often felt unacknowledged and unwanted. It was about the many transitions I experienced on a daily basis in the process.

Memories

My first memory of school is a positive one: of welcoming smiles and warm, inviting classrooms where teachers used their first names and enticed us to connect learning to the vibrant world, people and community we saw around us through song, colours and play. I remember the anticipation and excitement around learning the alphabet. It was a secret code and language that adults and older children had access to, and I hadn't been given the keys to yet! It felt like a group adventure that our reception class had embarked on together just for the enjoyment and because it was our rite of passage. The weight of stratification, labels and the process of invidualisation had not yet entered the equation or attached its heavy chains to our inquisitive minds. Our reception class felt safe and communal and at the very heart of Brixton's community life.

It was when I was six that an invisible weight started to attach itself to my hitherto free-flowing experience of school. I felt its presence in the sternness my mother used to correct any pronunciation of words brought home from the playground that deviated from her Queen's English, the same sternness her father had used to coach her into his social class. I felt its rigidity in the ceaseless 'educational' exercises that had started invading any downtime we had together, replicating the same rituals placed on her when she was my age. I felt its heaviness in the faces of the many professionals that entered my carefree afternoons, who segregated me from my play dates and friends and reported any signs of my 'advancement' to my mother with anxious precision. Their emphasis on results, grading systems, difficulty and tests were foreign to me but their spell-binding effect on my mother made clear to me that there was something bigger at play than anyone would openly let on to.

It was around this time too that I was given a tutor to advance my reading age above that of my peers. At the time, no-one explained *why*, so I assumed it meant I was somehow not good enough to continue on

the voyage of alphabet learning with my classmates and friends.[2] From our sombre exchanges, I quickly understood from the reading tutor that the unspoken task here was to demonstrate that I could read words in the 'right' way and as quickly as possible, rather than connect with their potential meaning or relation to life. As all the worlds I had been carried to at bedtime were replaced by the call and response of relentless repetition and correction, my interest in reading faded. Pretend reading became my tool to overcome the block 'reading practice' had placed between me and my discovery of life; a quick fix to abate my mother's unquenchable thirst for signs that she had indeed produced a 'bright' daughter, and to paste over my emerging fears that I may in fact not be up to the task. The sense of embarrassment I felt when I was caught out one day by a family friend who asked me to recount the book I had just rushed through a little too unconvincingly, comes back to me powerfully now, alongside an image of the look of confusion on my best friend's face. She couldn't quite comprehend why I would rush through something that for her was a source of pure joy, to be actively elongated. It would take me many years to lose the sense of obligation I associated with reading and get back to making books last for my own enjoyment.

Dad's Withdrawal

It was around this time too that, as if by an unspoken rule, my South African father began to remove himself from reading and other such activities; now commandeered as part of the 'project of my education'. He was my hero, whose talents with words, musicality and African metaphor had an unrivalled ability to whisk me away into the full essence of a story. Educated into an institutionalised system of racial hierarchy and segregation under the apartheid regime in South Africa during the 1970s, he had been taught that white people had the intellect, know-how and birthright to receive and provide a 'good' education—by definition better than any he could contribute to. Abdicating his role in my education,

[2] My mother has since explained it was about preparing me for an entrance exam for a local private school she had her eyes on.

and when my parents separated, handing over my entire upbringing to my mother, was familiar to him, it was what he knew. He recognised *her* as having the right accent, connections, know-how and skin colour to take charge.

Beneath the overt racist violence he knew to resist, he had been quietly trained: trained to announce approvingly my mother's knowledge of five European languages, but hastily to brush off the nine 'bantu' ones he could talk fluently, as somehow unimportant or invalid; trained to quickly shut down my mother's petitions that he teach me his mother tongue, as if the mere suggestion was demeaning and laughable; trained to beam with pride when his friends struggled to distinguish my accent from that of a 'white person' over the phone; trained to remove himself from the house when my mother's friends and colleagues came around to socialise—just as his mother had taught him to make himself scarce for the white family whose house she worked in as a maid and where he would have to sneak through the garden fence for any chance of a mothering moment. He had been socialised to think that he would have nothing to add or contribute to the conversation, little of value to pass down to me and, ultimately, no right to be there.

The stolen conversations he was able to have with those activists who could access Black consciousness literature and the sporadic glimpses he got of some of their forbidden pages were enough to confirm his intellectual and political understanding of racial hierarchy as a negative construct. But not enough to deconstruct the hidden layers of internalised inferiority that lay wait within him. The world's celebration of the 'end of apartheid' in 1994 and of 'freedom fighters' like him (who had risked their lives and forfeited their education in dismantling it) left little space for any subsequent acknowledgement or discussion of this in our house.

Thus, through his presence and absences, validations, dismissals and deferrals, my father drew clear fault lines between my two main symbolic representations of the world and my own emerging social identity. A British sphere and a non-British sphere; a sphere for my European heritage and a sphere for my African heritage; spheres for Blackness and spheres for whiteness. Items of special value to him, namely education,

knowledge, learning and me (his daughter), were placed firmly in the hands of my white mother.[3]

Feeling Unwelcome

I cannot pinpoint an exact moment where I understood that the world saw me as 'Black' and my mother 'white'. The construction of 'race' in my mind was gradual, hazy and muddled. The actions of my father chimed with the representations of 'Blackness' that trickled down into my childhood and that of my peers, through television, music, advertising and glimpses of the news, impressing themselves onto our young minds. And somewhere along the way a simplistic understanding of a 'Black' and a 'white' world was left to take hold within me as unchallenged fact, reinforced by the racialisation that began in my later years of primary school by children and adults who seemed to have interpreted the world in exactly the same way.

As my mother's fixation on the 'best' schools pushed me towards ever-whiter catchment areas and classrooms, this reinforcement came in many forms. Through relentless insults and fetishisation of my Afro hair in school playgrounds and corridors, as if such a stark symbol of 'race' and gender were somehow out of place in an institution of learning. Through the lack of any representation of my father's heritage amongst my teachers—which has underscored almost all of my subsequent education, in stark contrast to London life outside the school walls. Through the social policing I received from peers and teachers of my middle-class accent, which my 'white' friends were unquestionably allowed to have. This policing came in the form of mockery, drawn-out jokes and humiliation which I was instructed to find funny. I remember how the mother of one of my primary school friends would actively encourage her teenage son and his friend to mock me in front of her. This paved the way for his friend to publicly shame me as I walked to and from the bus stop of my

[3] Through conversations I have since had with my parents in preparation for this chapter, I now understand that my father's withdrawal from my life also had a lot to do with the breakdown of his relationship with my mother. At the time, however, I did not know this.

new secondary school for several years; making clear to me and everyone around me that I was an unwelcome anomaly in such a 'privileged' setting.

Piecing all this together, it is now clearer to me why the appearance of my father at a school fete in my final year of primary school induced such unexpected conflict in me, at a mere ten years of age. His presence as an African man betrayed that part of me that I needed to feel whole, yet I understood had to be kept quiet and purposefully ignored in and around educational settings. I believe that he understood this too and I cannot remember him coming to many other activities in the rest of my time at school.

Private School

In my final year of primary school, my mother formally introduced the idea of my going to a competitive private school for my secondary years. I picked up on the admiration this new concept commanded in her voice and quickly adopted it as my own (along with the fears she shared with me that if I were to continue in the state system, I would fall in with a group of 'Black girls' and start portraying the negative stereotypes she associated with 'them'). I wanted in. In on a place that my mother spoke about with such reverence. In on passing the same exam she had so effortlessly sat at my age. In on definitively being defined as 'bright' and 'intelligent'. In on what I thought was the ultimate ticket to acceptance in her world. In on being a 'clever girl'.[4]

And so just as her parents had done with her many years prior, my mother set about ensuring I was equipped with the inside knowledge needed to pass the entrance exam—proving to the school she had the right kind of connections, and that I had the obedience to jump through their stratified hoops.

The entrance exams did not come naturally to me. Despite being tutored for many weeks ahead of it, intimidation got the better of me and

[4] At times over the years, my mother's frustration at my father's unwillingness to partner her in the way she wanted or to father me the way she saw fit, would find momentary expression, in her referring to his 'stupidity'. This became seared into my memory, implanting a fear that this may one day be true about me, his child.

I dedicated much of my English paper to demonstrating my knowledge of 'clever' words—which I understood to mean long ones—by listing the full range of long-lettered adjectives I knew how to spell. The near incomprehensible stand-alone vocabulary list that I produced resulted in me sitting before the Head of English of the school, who instead put some poetry before me to interpret. Perhaps it was the genuine way she asked about the imagery, or the way in which the words chose to play outside intimidating rules. Perhaps it was their purposeful un-impressiveness, or the memories that the musicality triggered in me of enjoying words without obligation and before the departure of my father, but a sudden freedom re-entered me. A freedom to read, a freedom to interpret without fear of getting the right or wrong answer, a freedom to speak up, share my views, share my thoughts and feelings.

Once inside the school, I soon found something very different from the collective 'clever girl' oasis I had envisaged, in which I would forget about meaningless memorisation and measurements and get back to the business of enquiring about and integrating into the world around me. Instead, I found a world in which even a 'clever girl' could never be enough and would never be enough until she had fulfilled her sole purpose of producing high grades to sustain the school's rightful place in the league tables and then moved on to the next 'clever institution' with a new set of milestones promising to define her worth. A world in which the messiness of adolescence was fitted into a weekly one-hour PSHE lesson and any remnants of teenage angst were to be swept away under the carpet, no matter how soul-destroying for the person within. A world in which education and five years of life was to be reduced down to numbers on an official piece paper meant to define the very essence of who we are at the end of it.

Underlying this, I found a disorientating silence. Silence about how the grades and obsessive comparisons were portrayed as the very *point* of existence, to be prioritised over desperate cries for help and the many scars that strong feelings of inadequacy and depression can create on adolescent girls' bodies and minds. Silence about the oxymoron that 'clever girls' and 'clever women' were expected to work twice as hard as their male peers in the name of gender equality. Silence about the communities and histories we lived in and amongst, and how they differed so

jarringly from what was deemed valuable for us to learn and talk about. Silence about the inequality, hierarchy and power structures that the school aimed to perpetuate through us. Silence about the accompanying questions deemed unseemly to ask or acknowledge.

And so I was left to contend with the contrasting worlds and realities I saw and experienced in and around school, without guidance, the ability to vocalise or the tools to deconstruct or contextualise. I was left alone again in my experiences of every day racialisation and racism in and outside the school walls. Left to squirm in the loud silence of being one of only three brown girls in the entire year group and of having to actively ignore this, as if it were a secret too dirty to speak aloud. Left to accept the labelling of my mother's history as 'History', to the exclusion of my father's. Left to wonder why I was treated so differently, going to and from home in my school uniform, to how I was treated doing the same activities without it; the same contrasting treatment I experienced as a younger child depending on which parent I sat next to on the train, whose hand I held onto whilst walking down the road or who dropped me off at appointments. Left to wonder why I was allowed in this space when other girls that looked more like me were so clearly not. Left to question my ability. Left to question their ability. Left to question my sanity.

With this, however, I got 'good'. Good at consistently scoring enough to sit within the parameters for being a 'clever girl'. Good at parrot learning the version of the world presented to me through the 'sanitised' school curriculum, which I could only memorise rather than authentically 'identify with'. Good at ignoring the many questions my 'positioning' threw up in order to 'pass' in spaces I already felt unwelcome in. Good at silencing my inner thoughts and knowing in exchange for what was considered the 'right' answer to the 'right' questions to ask. Good at negating my own identity and silencing my experience as a person of colour in order to comply with the many unspoken rules of being a 'clever girl' in that institution. And so I became a 'clever girl'.

English Class

Fifteen years on and it doesn't take much to conjure up the sickening feeling of walking into those dark, imposing classrooms where our English classes would take place every week. The cold sense of dread that would build inside me like a creeping tide throughout the week as the allocated time to file into class and be confronted with my silent struggle approached.

One winter morning in year eleven, as the reading aloud turn-taking snaked around the class and got closer and closer to me, the burning sense of claustrophobia became too unbearable to stand, like an impending death you know is coming yet are unable to prevent. When it got to me, I found myself paralysed and unable to do anything but blurt out the truth—'I can't breathe'—before tearing out of the classroom in search of escape. The expression of horror and confusion on my English teacher's face is seared into my memory alongside the cold shame of how I felt inside. The 'episode' (which at the time I had no words to explain) was soon put down to my 'conscientiousness'—a semi-compliment that spoke to the way that the school wanted to maintain the fear they saw as driving me and my peers to do 'so well'. Only now, when over a decade has passed, am I able to look the paralysis I experienced in the face and acknowledge what 'English' class really represented to me.

English class. 'English', the 'English class'. The subject, the noun, the adjective, the elusive identity, all seemed to go to the very crux of my struggle for meaning, truth, self-identity and acceptance. My struggle for the same assumed belonging that my white friends, peers and family could peacefully bask in but where I faced inner and outer question marks that I was ill-prepared to acknowledge or answer. My struggle to connect the real elements of my social identity with the socially constructed ones. The class tortured me in its seemingly genuine invitation for my inner thoughts and interpretation of the world to be validated.

In many ways the tension had been accumulating over many years, as part of me grew to understand that something greater was at play in my education than anyone would admit. The stakes felt higher in English and seemed to go to the heart of the school's own anxiety over securing

its pupils' acceptance in intended circles. By now, a part of me understood how the subject held the keys to the coded rules of grammar, writing style and pronunciation that would distinguish me as a 'clever girl' in spaces where I felt unwanted, ostracising me further from those spaces where society told me I was acceptable.

English had had an intimidating seriousness attached to it throughout my education and here it was again, asking me to use my voice. The same voice that so 'offensively' challenged the neat, constructed identity I had been assigned, crossing an important line that I and many around me had internalised as important to uphold. A voice which had heard the implicit instructions to be silent but that was also bursting to come out. A voice which, unable to voice the unspeakable, fell silent in that moment.

Shaking Off My Education

I will never forget the wonder I felt coming across the first real-life Black academic I had ever encountered, at SOAS[5] *(even after all my twenty seven years, I had never even come across a Black teacher). As I sat chatting with my Swiss friend on the lawn, my mind drifted off in awe, imagining him lecturing before halls full of bright-eyed students from across the world. In that moment, a world of new possibilities opened up for me.*

It has taken many years of distance to start the process of shaking off my education. Of shaking off the many scripts, stereotypes, expectations and fears imposed on me that made me feel so out of place in educational spaces. Of shaking off the unspoken rules that made me feel the need to silence my everyday experiences as a person of colour. Of shaking off the shame about the way my specific social and constructed identities intersected.

It seems to me at this moment that for my Black, working class father and my white middle-class mother, I was their transition, their project, their ticket into the post-race, post-class world that they were hoping the creation of a 'clever' dual heritage girl would produce. I feel a mixture of guilt, loss and inevitability that this didn't happen. Loss for the missed

[5] The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

opportunity of finding meaning and fulfilment in what was meant to be a 'privilege' for someone 'like me'. Guilt for believing that idea and for not believing it. Guilt for not being content with the silences in which I squirmed, when so many others seemed to be contented and wanted me to be too. Guilt for becoming 'clever' at the expense of what I knew to be true. For daring to want more. Guilt for not daring enough.

I feel sad that I understood 'cleverness' to mean stratification, passing exams, whitewashing history, silencing my own existence and experience for the comfort of others, switching off my analytical mind and striving for acceptance in a 'white' world. I also understand that this definition came from what I was taught.

The process of shaking off my education has been slow, with steps forward and backward. I treated my four years of studying for an undergraduate university degree like I did the educational exercises pushed on me as a reluctant child, instead of seeing the opportunity it spelled to connect with the world I had so badly wanted to connect with when I was younger.

But I have also made some progress. I have come to recognise that perhaps I was not as alone in my experience as I thought at the time. I have come to see the broader context and structures at play. I have come to see the many inter-generational echoes, the repetition and the patterns from my father's and my mother's own educations.

I have also found theories, approaches, voices, people and institutions that ask different questions and look into the mirrors that I was told by others to ignore, unafraid of what they might see. That give a voice to versions of the world that I saw and thought was unspeakable.

What I internalised through education was a need to negate my identity and silence my experience in order to comply with the many unspoken rules of being a 'clever girl' in my context. I am now happy to distance myself from this and many other concepts I once longed to live up to and to start the journey of re-defining them for myself.

Postscript

I have involved both of my parents in the researching of this contribution and would like to thank them for their honesty, bravery and openness to this process.

16

‘Is this *yours*? … Did *you* write this?’

Victoria Adukwei Bulley

Introduction

In 1971, the British Caribbean publishing press New Beacon released Bernard Coard’s *How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System*. In 2019, nearly fifty years later, an online article by BBC News reported a decade-long study by Oxford University into the experiences of Black students in British secondary schools. The study’s findings concluded that Black pupils were twice as likely to be ‘wrongly identified as having one of a range of special needs’,[1] which had in turn led to their schooling being ‘dumbed down’. In spite of the fact that I was never identified as a student with special educational needs—quite the opposite in fact, becoming known as a high achiever—it is telling that nonetheless the results of the study feel very familiar.

[1] Richardson H (2019) Black pupils’ schooling ‘dumbed down’ over special needs, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47240580 Accessed 4 April 2019.

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My time at school was mostly positive; however, it was also marked by the sense that less was expected of me than I expected—and sometimes had already achieved—for myself. On more than a few occasions, work that I took pride in—in subjects which I enjoyed or excelled at—was praised, but not unequivocally.

'Is this *yours*? … Did *you* write this?'

I would often find this penned onto sheets of work that had been marked by teachers. Not so much a celebration of my work, more a sense of dissonance. Retrospectively, I can see that in spite of my grades and other later achievements, the version of me that would have benefited from being pushed by my teachers has been lost. This is the version of myself today—as a writer and artist—that remains cautious when trying to determine whether work that I'm told is good really *is* good—or whether it has just surpassed a more mediocre idea of what I had been trusted to produce. It is the girl in me who often experiences a lack of confidence or assuredness about her place in a privileged institutional space, who finds herself asking what she has the right to feel entitled to and catches herself 'always stepping aside'.

Admittedly, I am a lucky one. I am the youngest of four children, with a gap of sixteen years between the eldest and me. My parents were still training when the eldest two were young. When I was growing up, they were trained and working for the NHS, as mental health and theatre nurses, respectively. I was fortunate. By the time I was in late primary school they were able to afford tutoring for me as a way of compensating for some of the lack of enthusiasm from teachers at my local state schools. Private tutoring may not typically be seen as a working-class option; but just like my experience of being subject to low expectations in school, what it means to be—or not be—working class is inflected by being Black in Britain. Even where two parents become professionals and are able to accumulate wealth, originating from an immigrant background often entails the loss of family support networks and connections, constituting a rupture in continuity which can persist through and impact upon generations of children raised here. In many ways, to be Black is to

be 'classed' by default, resulting in a kind of lumping-together of different kinds of 'otherness'. But lived experience is more complicated than that.

Read together, the two poems included here give voice to my experiences of school and working life, at the carefully managed intersections of gender, race and economics.

* * *

Clever girl's notes to self

you know the answers but you wait a minute
before raising your hand in class.

you raise your hand to give the answer
often enough—but not too much.

this is a careful balance, an active choice
you know you must remain *a joy to teach*,

polite and always *smiling* in reports, you've been
like this since age seven, Year 2.

in Year 12, when the class is none the wiser
Miss Dee looks to you for help.

the essays you work all night on
return headed with top marks.

all the same, Miss Dee asks
in red biro ink if the writing is yours.

you raise your hand to give answers
often enough, but not too much—

enough to let her know you're smart
just not enough to make her think

that you already know you are.
a high achiever. incredibly bright.

capable, above average, homework always
on time when due, exceptional

but still, Miss Dee likes it better
when it looks like it's news to you.

* * *

Is this yours?/clever girl's itinerary of observations from the museum and beyond

[Not mine]: at the museum. monthly department meeting: updates. vast conversation about the uses of shadow in the building. *are our galleries too dark? how may we use lighting interactively?* lively discussion across the table. aplomb.

[Mine]: a residency at the museum. focus: the legacy of British absentee slave-ownership in the 19th Century; artefacts of this historical fact in the collection.

[Not mine]: silence(s) across the table in the wake of speaking about this work, in the wake of mentioning that museums must tell uneasy truths.

[Mine]: iPhone recording audio in my pocket to listen back to ~~the meeting~~ myself later.

[Mine]: the unease in my voice.

[mine/maybe ours]: new curatorial staff member, northern, white working class: *I'm noticing there is a way of getting things done here—that you have to do things their way, or people stop listening…*

[Not mine]: walking to the office through the silverworks gallery. public opening hours. the enthusiasm with which a visitor—a man, white—steps generously out of my way, metres in advance of our paths crossing. the grandeur of it, my goodness. the unspoken *why yes, you first!*

[Mine]: realisation: I am always stepping aside.

[Mine]: remembrance: today I am wearing my newly pressed staff badge

[Not mine]: brief facial expression of recalibration when the name on the CV—the woman imagined—doesn't match the woman who arrives for interview.

[not mine any more]: the idea that gains traction in the group discussion, spoken once again, but from a different mouth

[Not mine]: *as great admirers of your work, we would love to have you with us. unfortunately, on this occasion, we regret that we are not able to offer a fee—however, we are confident that the event provides a brilliant platform for exposure.*

[unfortunately, not mine]: rent, food, books, travel—paid for on an Exposure Express card.

[not words of mine, necessarily]: *BAME*, *BME*, *marginalised, diverse, fresh, new voice, important, exciting, necessary, unheard, underrepresented, under-served, hard-to-reach, nextgeneration, latest, first-ever, last, only—*

[Mine]: my work

[Mine]: these words

Reference

Coard, B. (1971). *How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System*. London: New Beacon.

17

A Letter to My Younger Self

Claire Mitchell

Last day of Primary 1, aged 5

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Dear Claire

You asked me where it all started. Like lots of things you're dealing with at the moment, that's a really difficult question. But do you remember sitting in a lecture theatre when you were 7? In that dimly lit room, you sat with your colouring pencils in hand, drawing pictures, oblivious to what is going on around you. You didn't know then that the paper you were given had been torn from a block filled with notes on child psychological development or that the older man in the tweed suit telling his 'stories' at the front of the room was a lecturer. Neither did you have any idea the impact this experience would have on you.

But for the time being, everything's ok because Mum is sitting next to you, eagerly listening to what is being said while trying to keep up with her notes. You feel contentment in this place. You don't realise that she is having a very different experience. How could you have known how stressful it is for her, having to take a child along with her to classes?

You only learned much later that she had begun her studies as an undergraduate in Psychology at 27 years old; that she was the first one in her family to go to university; that she has to study while raising you with very little emotional or financial support behind her. She was strong and determined—determined to provide a better life for you, as a single parent separated from your Dad when you were only 3. So there you are, attending lectures with her during the school holidays because she can't afford child care. You could never have known that in 10 years' time, you will be sitting in the same lecture hall, being taught by the very same lecturer. And neither of us could have guessed that we would both be facing exactly the same levels of insecurity 10 years after that.

Do you remember how all your friends at primary school said that it was 'weird' that Mum was your best friend? It 'wasn't allowed', they said. But you were a team. Let me tell you a secret: in 10 years' time, you still will be. Maybe those 'friends' thought it was lonely not having lots of others at home, but you were happy. Although you hadn't formulated it then in terms of class, others would have described where you lived as a predominantly middle-class town and recognised that your school friends all came from more affluent backgrounds than you. That wasn't something that concerned you very much, though, was it, unaware as you were that the move to this area was prompted by Mum wanting you to grow

up in a safer area with a better education, even if it meant she had to make sacrifices?

You're too busy enjoying school. You love reading and playing outside equally, just like any other average kid. That's how you feel at this time—average—even though you are often told how 'clever' you are and even though you excel in many different areas. You take great pride in these accomplishments but still think of them—and you—as 'normal'. We all see our childhood as normal at the time, don't we? Like the privately rented two-bedroom house you and Mum share—small but perfectly sized for your little family. Not having much in material terms is 'normal' too—you never feel like you're going without or deprived of anything. Ok, there was that year you both lived on beans on toast for the whole summer because Mum was struggling to pay the bills. You probably remember this because as young as you were you could feel through the tension how distraught Mum was, you could feel the pain it caused her not to be able to give you more. But you also saw her strength and how she managed to keep going despite her struggles. You weren't to know then that this is part of the reason you would become a strong woman in your turn. I bet if I asked you, you wouldn't be able to recount any specific conversations you had about it but right now, you believe all these hard times will be worth it in the end. You just know there will come a time when Mum will be able to use her degree to get a better paying job. There's a lot of hope for the future right now, isn't there?

It's strange how quickly all this changed once you got to high school. It will be years before, with the distance of hindsight, you come to think of the amount of influence your friends had over you then as absurd. Where did that fear of being judged as different come from? You were so desperate to fit in. It came to rule this part of your life and it changed your whole perspective. Your friends came from that 'typical' middle-class family: two parents and two siblings. Without the wherewithal to 'classify' at that time, what you *were* aware of was that their parents all had important jobs, lived in oversized houses, had nice cars, went on several holidays every year and never had to worry about having the latest 'it' thing. No wonder you became much more aware of your 'poorer' status in society.

No more sitting in lecture theatres now. Mum had got her undergraduate degree and had begun to work on her Masters, which meant she could only work part-time. I don't need to remind you how hard she worked at that waitressing job—harder than anyone else you knew—but you still couldn't help but feel shame for being different and for not having as much as others. I know that it caused you to change the way you think about yourself, your home and your schooling. Fitting in was so important to you. Of course it was. That's normal too! I know you often felt saddened but also embarrassed about Mum and Dad's separation. I know the shame you experienced because of not having the same kind of family as others, because of Dad having another family. It was not something you ever spoke about. It was something you learned to hide from others, which only fed the shame. You were still living in the same rented accommodation with Mum. Still just managing to pay the bills every month with not much left over. Still so little stability that if something was ever to go wrong financially one month, making it impossible to pay the rent, you would lose your home. You knew without it being spelled out that everything could be taken away so quickly because there was nothing to fall back on.

You know that stereotype of the working-class girl? That girl who wears tracksuits and looks unkempt. The one who is lazy, unintelligent, has a bad attitude and doesn't care about her education? Of course you do because it was very important to you that you didn't have that image. In its place, you worked hard to cultivate an image of the good 'clever' girl. You worked every weekend to pay for those extra things you wanted—nice clothes, make up. You were one of the few among your friends who had a job. On top of this, you aligned yourself with the smart kids at school, so that others would see you the same way.

So why was it around this time that you began to lose interest in school? That your motivation and drive to do well, to achieve those good grades, were soon gone? Maybe it's not so surprising that you became tired of an education system that demanded that you constantly jump through a series of needless hoops in order to prove yourself. That you sit many exams, complete assignments, keep up with extra-curricular activities—that, in fact, you sell yourself to the 'higher' education body. It's ok, I know how difficult all that was—when you didn't feel worthy, never felt

good enough and started to believe that you would never amount to much anyway—just as society thought. You see, societal stereotypes can be internalised, and this had a major effect on your self-esteem.

And then, a few years into secondary school, you were asked to choose five subjects which would be crucial for getting into university and would form the basis of your future career. It was so difficult to make a decision. There was so much you could do with your life, but it seemed much more sensible to you then to get a job and start bringing money into the family. After all, education hadn't brought the two of you anything thus far. Hardly surprising then that you often you wished that Mum could just get a 'proper' job, so that you could both have the lives others had. University didn't seem worth it—and what would someone like you be any good at anyway? Somehow, you ended up applying to university nonetheless. Encouragement from Mum was part of it. Its being the norm with your peers another—because you still wanted so desperately to be the same as everyone else.

The irony was not lost on you that starting university brought a level of security that you had never experienced before. As a Scottish student studying in Scotland, tuition was free and loans awarded to all. And for students like you, coming from low income households, a yearly bursary too, that did not have to be paid back. You were aware of how lucky you were to have received all of this because without it university would never have been an option. You were also aware now, however, of the major differences between the working-class and middle-class students. You were fortunate that your student loan meant you could pay rent and bills without too much worry, fortunate that your basic expenses were covered—but it still wasn't enough to cover everything. You needed books, travelling expenses. You wanted to socialise like the other students. So you had to work part-time. All weekend, every weekend. I know how exhausting it was, trying to keep up with your university work. I know how conscious you were that others didn't have to work while studying; that they had more time to get the grades and make the most of their education.

You noticed pretty early on that there were other differences too. Not only a financial but a cultural gap between you and your peers. All the countries they'd visited! All the visits they'd made to art galleries and

museums, enabling them to discuss what they'd seen and learned with parents who had done the same in their youth. All the opportunities they'd had for private music and dance classes. You'd never thought much about all that when you were younger, but you noticed now how this lack of opportunity set you apart from the rest. Your peers came to university with a vast amount of experience to draw upon that you lacked, and I know that at times this meant that you couldn't quite keep up with the conversations and that that made you feel inadequate all over again.

Luckily it wasn't long until university also exposed you to people like yourself, people who had been brought up like you. Gradually, the free tuition fees in Scotland meant more and more people from working-class backgrounds were able to go to university and once you'd found them and began to spend time with them, you felt more comfortable with your upbringing and realised that, actually, you weren't so different after all. What a revelation, when you realised that you did not have to fit the mould you had once thought was the 'good' type of person to be. This was the point you began to feel proud of where you came from and of how hard you and your family had had to work to get to where you were! A great deal of healing came from being able to talk about this. The shame you had felt before disappeared. You realised that you may have to work that bit harder than others to achieve your goals but if anything, that just inspired you more. You *wanted* to work hard, achieve your dreams and finally 'make something' out of your life. Although you knew now there was no shame in being working class, you wanted to finally see the rewards of education and 'move out'. You finally felt worthy. You could see the rest of your future taking shape. All you had to do was get your degree. You didn't imagine then that you and Mum would both achieve undergraduate *and* Master's degrees. Wouldn't it be great if that meant you finally had that security you longed for? Wouldn't it be great if that meant you were finally using your ambition and intelligence in fulfilling jobs that paid you well?

Once you graduated, you thought you would find it easier to find a better job. You hadn't faced the realities of an increasingly competitive job market then, in which it is still difficult to get ahead when you have no money behind you. Good job that you didn't know, when you had overcome that early loss of motivation, gained a sense of pride in the

educational achievements your hard work had brought you and were facing the world full of hope, that you would find your opportunities limited once more. That you would find yourself applying for jobs close enough to home for you to afford the travel costs, taking jobs that allow you to pay the bills rather than the ones you dreamt of. Those jobs, it turns out, require *more* courses. They require you to undertake unpaid work. They require contacts that you don't have. Would you ever have imagined when you watched how hard Mum worked waitressing to make ends meet, and when you both survived on beans on toast for a summer, that there would come a time when people with higher degrees would be expected to work for no money? That can't be true, you would have said.

There's an expectation that you should be doing well now—an expectation that for a long time you shared since, after all, you had played your part and worked hard. So the struggle should have paid off by now, right? Sadly, that's not the case. I hardly dare tell you that Mum is in much the same position, her dreams of using her skills to open her own business shattered. Her degree didn't equate to money in the bank either. I can't help but ask myself, has any of it been worth it? We are older now, and wiser, Mum and I, but we still we don't have the life we have been working so hard to obtain. What we do have is thousands of pounds of debt. More mountains to climb to reach security. I'm sorry to tell you, Claire, sitting there oblivious in your first lecture theatre, feeling content with your coloured pencils and paper, listening to those 'stories', that the struggle goes on. And on.

With love and sorrow,

Claire

18

Fractured Lives and Border Crossings

Emily Green

Bored but Bright

A trip to the educational psychologist marked the beginning of a meandering path towards later-life recognition that I am perceived by some as a 'clever girl'. When I was three, a woman dressed in a synthetic beige jumper and clasping a clipboard asked me to build her a tower out of wooden blocks. Even as I sprawled across the bare floorboards, I noted how incongruous they seemed in this minimalist, clinical office environment. She gave me a wide smile, like a presenter on the television, but I could see that while I was placing an assortment of primary coloured bricks one on top of another in an attempt to reach the Styrofoam ceiling, she was going to make marks in boxes on her form in a way that would somehow affect me. I refused to comply. I told her instead, in emphatic tones, that I would be making a farm that day; that the green squares represented the vibrant pastures where my animals would spend their working days; and, conveying the urgency of my own instruction, that the farmer and his wife, now carefully balanced on top of their farm house, must not be disturbed. This didn't seem to fit into the neat, safe

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square boxes on her form. And it seemed to bring the appointment to an end. She announced to nobody in particular that I was 'bored, but bright', and in desperate need of a challenge.

Shortly after what was later referred to as 'the farm incident', a Board of Important People made decisions about my future. The first of many files was created with my name and date of birth on the front cover. I was to start school with almost immediate effect, several terms early. Urgent trips into the city centre followed, to acquire a school uniform and to hunt down appropriate Velcro shoes because I could not yet tie my laces independently. The decision to start school was not solely in response to evidence of my landscaping aspirations, showcased that day. The appointment had been made because my parents were mentally and physically at the end of their capacities to manage the challenging behaviour I was intent on displaying both within the home and, to my mother's mortification, in public. I was defiant, refusing help with any form of task and as a result, I was not a happy child. I resented being told something without an explanation of the reasons for an action and what it really meant, communicated without adult 'jargon'. Reflecting now, I suspect I was highly sensitive to any hint of the kind of patronising tendencies adults can unwittingly adopt, through language and gestures, when dealing with children and young adults, and that this accounted for my resistance. I craved to be in control, to be the decision maker, and I felt an overwhelming need to express these feelings in physical and verbal ways. This routine behaviour—refusing to comply with any reasonable instruction and having frequent meltdowns—continued and became amplified during the swirl of emotions surrounding my first day of school.

My experiences of formal learning at primary school were fortunately very positive, despite my initial concerns and anxieties about entering this unknown world called education. The refuge I took in that reception class with its haunting smell of PVA glue and pink antibacterial soap formed the foundations on which my fervour for learning was nurtured and my challenging behaviour, in school at least, rapidly improved. As part of my induction prior to joining my new class, it was arranged for me to meet my teacher, who must have been in her late twenties and who embodied the maternal qualities to which I have always found myself drawn like a magnet. She was one of those unforgettable influences, who

championed my rapid ascent to the summit of my age-recommended reading levels during my three and a half years at the school, encouraging my fascination with new vocabulary and helping me to identify the patterns in the ways words are formed. This has been a recurring experience throughout my education: teachers going beyond their duty of care to support my educational and emotional needs. It wasn't until my early twenties, however, that I began to explore why this might have been so. Long before then though, my lovely maternal teacher and her supportive colleagues at that school were snatched away. We were to move from a small yet diverse city in the Southwest of England to my mother's former home in a deprived pocket of the Welsh valleys.

What I experienced as a major disruption to my life was due to major disruptions in my parents' lives: they had both come close to death within just months of one another. My mother had fortunately detected the lump in her breast early, but months of radio and chemotherapy had left her exhausted. My father was a working-class Northern lad, who had grown up on a diet of tinned corned beef, pork pies and white bread and his thick waistline and high cholesterol levels were a warning of what was to come. When his heart clogged and failed to beat as it should, he was sitting on the patio of our garden, his third round of jam on toast smeared across his cheek. The first of many heart attacks. They decided they wanted to live a simpler life in the countryside.

These health scares served as the catalyst which ultimately led me to question my identity. Although identity is hardly a concept many seven-year olds would have formulated, I had an awareness of what this abrupt move would mean for me—upheaval, change—and that age old cliché—putting a plaster over the wounds in a family who should have broken up some years before. Education had given me stability; routine had supported a new regime of behaviour management. I had never really felt different from my peers but this shift removed the sense of belonging and acceptance that became manifest at the very moment it was threatened. It wasn't an abrupt transition. Finalising the paperwork around houses and GP surgeries lasted some months. During this period, it was my mother who drip-fed me rousing narratives of past summers spent grappling with tangled hawkweed which had invaded fields' corners and adventures of navigating the precarious terrain surrounding the local coal

mine. 'We'd never venture across the *quarry* though', she'd add. 'We weren't that *twp*[1]!' In between tales, she'd allow her breath to escape with a forceful, audible exhalation through her pursed lips, already deeply lined thanks to years of nicotine addiction, before revisiting scenes involving sardine sandwiches and cockle picking with an old spoon from her aunt's cupboard. She'd always told these stories and as I grew older, she would weave strange consonants into them, her throat vibrating as the sounds spilled out and hit my eardrums. A language which has no silent letters, each word a delicious concoction dripping off her rolled tongue, fighting to be heard. Until now, this peculiar land had existed for me only in folklore, a source of stories about a community which dealt with hardships I'd never endured. I couldn't have foretold then that it would enhance my eventual sense of belonging—or how it would do so.

Fitting in Part 1

The tales my mother had told me in an attempt to cajole me into accepting this new life failed in the face of the scolding I received on my first day at my new school—a scolding in a new language that would make no logical sense for some years to come. My first day coincided with a school trip which was organised and led entirely in Welsh. Fortunately, one of the other children realised that I had no understanding of what was being said and started to translate. It was a kind gesture, demonstrating a huge amount of empathy from someone so young. However, it served as a prescient warning for how I came to be perceived by some. In an area where the majority had lived in the same village for generations and almost 70 per cent of inhabitants spoke fluent Welsh, I was an obvious outsider. I was frequently called or referred to as a '*saes*', which roughly translates as 'an English person'. It is not a neutral term, however, but a derogatory one carrying connotations of being untrustworthy, generally undesirable and unattractive. (A conversation about a missing item, overheard at my friend's house: 'Well, it could have been Emily who took it. After all, she is a *saes*').

[1] 'Twp'—an affectionate Welsh term, with no direct translation, for 'being silly'.

These days there is no clear evidence of any particular regionalism in my accent due to the fusion of my parents' very different voices when I was growing up and the frequent moving around throughout my life. My accent is often assumed to derive from 'somewhere vague in the south of England', although it now unconsciously shifts according to the social group I'm in at the time. At the point we moved to Wales, I had never given much thought to my accent—it was just my voice, after all. But there, I tried to stop speaking in my usual accent. I started to imitate my peers and this continued until my late teens. At first, I would purposely mispronounce letters and phrases. I would study how my friends used different words from both English and Welsh, amalgamating the two into a new language which everyone still somehow understood. Here, it seemed, different linguistic rules applied. The same was true of cultural indicators of class.

It was almost like there was an additional class system in that pocket of Wales, with its own rules and regulations. Following any trajectory other than settling down with your significant other at the time and rearing children who would inevitably follow this same path less than two decades later was dismissed as 'too ambitious'. Stick with your own. Do not venture from the valley. There were also rules in relation to a hierarchy of material possessions—owning a large detached house as some individuals did in the next village over would make you 'posh', but a flash car would be met with admiration. Even if these impressive cars with new number plates were bought on finance with extortionate interest rates, they were valued highly. Degrees and certificates were not. I could not understand it, but I longed to fit in. My defiance in the face of the child psychologist's boxes and form had felt like an achievement, but now I was desperate to put a tick in every square and jump through every hoop in order to join the world of my peers. I definitely didn't want to be a *saes* with all the connotations that label carried and I was desperate to act in the correct way. But what was this? There were so many contradictions. If academic achievements were not valued in the same way that they had been in my previous world, there were few employment opportunities anyway. However, there were also many social problems as a result. Drug abuse, poverty and underage sex between children as young as eleven or twelve years old were not considered unusual. Outside the home, I lived in a

valley that housed a fiercely patriotic former mining community who hated politics in general and Margaret Thatcher in particular and seemed to have given up on acquiring qualifications. Within my family, my parents agreed with the policies of the Labour government, and particularly valued 'education, education, education'.[2]

Fitting in, Part 2

Their stance on education is hardly surprising given that my father had been the Principal of a large Community College in East Devon for over a decade. In terms of occupation and income, he would be considered by many as middle-class but he would never have identified as such. He grew up as an only child in the sleepy town of Nantwich in the North of England and his reference from school on his university application form read 'This boy does not conform in school dress or behaviour'. He had been expelled for a period just before his O-levels but reached an agreement with the Head that he would still be allowed to sit the exams. He received high grades and was allowed to stay on for A-levels. At a time when people got into university with two A-levels, he took five (two of which, including politics, were self-taught) and passed them all. He was a first-generation university student and until her death in 2018, his mother had his '2:1' Bachelor's degree certificate framed above the fireplace in her living room.

Despite his achievements and his resilience in the face of adversity, he was not someone who I considered a role model until long after *his* death. He suffered from a mental illness and made multiple suicide attempts, resulting in several stays in psychiatric units and, at one point, a move out of the family home. My school was very much involved in the impact of all this on me. After his second attempt to take his own life, I was kept behind at the end of the day and taken to the library by the Headmaster until my mother came to collect me. The Head quietly asked me about the type of books I liked to read and how I was getting on in my English

[2] Quotation taken from former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's 1996 party conference speech, when stating his main priorities for government.

and History lessons—safe, familiar, small talk. No mention of what had led to my being asked to stay behind after school hours or why the usually invisible Headmaster was there with me—but it didn't require explanation, then or the next time… The helicopter hovered over the mountains in Wales several times; searching for him, dipping lower as his silhouette was detected weaving in and out of the shrubbery which my mother had once used as a selling point for the move. Living in an area where the two sources of all knowledge were the Working Men's club and Mrs. Jones at the corner shop, it was inevitable that everybody would find out in time. As a result, I was no longer just a *saes*. I was now from a fractured home and we were one income down. I have never, and still do not harbour any negative feelings towards the acts that my father carried out. A mental illness and personality disorder had consumed him for most of his life. It was beyond his control. But his suicide attempts and long stays in psychiatric care did propel me into another realm where I felt numb. At the same time, in a strange way, it also drew me closer to the people I so desperately wanted to be like. I knew what it was to suffer loss, to experience injustice. I became more accepted among my peers. I felt at home. My accent was no longer 'put on'.

Despite having taken early retirement when we moved to Wales, my father had carried on working as an examiner for several Examination Boards and this, combined with a pension, meant that we were fortunate to have had some money in the home. Nevertheless, our food items would usually come in bags with luminous yellow stickers covering the barcode,[3] and the majority of our clothes came from car boot sales or charity shops. This was largely due to my father's sense of guilt. In his mind, he had been forced to abandon his working-class roots due to his occupation and he was trying to find some familiar ground. It was something that informed his professional life too. After my grandmother passed away, I inherited a box—the sort most families have tucked away in an attic space or have left forgotten underneath the television unit. It contained pictures of me holding my dad's hand on a beach (I'm smiling—he is not) and several newspaper cuttings, the print slightly worn and the corners yellowing. One of the headlines reads 'The school rebel

[3] Indicating an end-of-shelf-life discount.

with a real cause'. It was a celebratory piece written for the local *Echo* after my father had announced his early retirement following his heart attack. He had given a short interview about his educational philosophy to a journalist and was quoted as saying: 'I have always believed in getting talented people and giving them a lot of freedom and independence. It's not a wishy-washy, soft liberal stance but a really humane approach that really values all children'.

Fitting in, Part 3

Another move took place shortly after my sixteenth birthday. My father had moved out of the family home, my mother had met a new partner and we were to live in Cardiff, the capital of Wales. It was a far cry from the anonymous village where I'd grown up. And which, once more, I did not want to leave. By this point, I had lived in the Welsh valleys for almost a decade and it had become my home. I had adapted. I had learned how to live in this place. It was all I knew. My memories of living anywhere else had been erased, taped over; my old identity replaced with my new one. I had achieved good General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results, but had kept my ambitions to go to university to myself. I had worked hard behind the scenes but nonchalantly dismissed any coursework or exam achievements as 'luck' so as not to feel excluded, as I had been all of those years ago. When, prior to the move, my mother tried to get me a place in a school in Cardiff with a high achieving sixth form, I declined. Point Blank refused. The school had a reputation for being very academic and tremendously successful. Despite my exam results, I would be a complete fraud—an imposter. How could I possibly meet the standards of such an establishment after attending a village school with only 500 students to compete with? These 'relocation anxieties' took me by surprise. I enrolled at the local college. Not necessarily the greatest choice academically, but in terms of pastoral care it saved me.

I experienced a breakdown when I was eighteen and left education for a short period. I would sleep for days yet was constantly fatigued. Some days I could not work the mechanics of moving my jaw and opening my mouth to put food inside it, let alone create coherent sentences.

Coursework piled up and revision was left untouched. But I also had space to reflect: I was right about the contrast between growing up in a small village and the level of academic competition in the big city. Here at the local college, those who achieved top marks academically were relatively few since most had chosen a college education to pursue vocational courses. But I could see that there were some who didn't fit this profile—students with exceptional minds, students whose teachers had wanted them to stay on for sixth form but who had defied them, students who were now excelling in a more independent college environment. I realised this—and the implications for what I was in danger of forfeiting educationally—at the same time as discovering that I had not addressed all the memories and attendant images of what I had witnessed throughout my father's illness and the emotions accompanying these episodes. Grief poured out of me like black tar. I could not escape it nor rid myself of it.

Fortunately for me, my English lecturer had noticed my sporadic attendance and my inability to function in class when I was there. She had that ability to sense that something was awry and she opened the lines of communication. Sensitively, she asked about my home life. It all spilled out, an oral autobiography. With her support—and after hours of my making excuses as to why I should not—I returned to college the next academic year to re-sit my A-levels. I can't remember much of that year and my grades were well below what I had been predicted to achieve but I nevertheless gained a place at university to study English and Creative Writing. I chose to stay in Cardiff as I could not cope with another move and a large means-tested student grant meant that I could afford to live in Halls of Residence. But it was a bittersweet experience.

Fitting in, Part 4

Unlike others at university, I had not adhered to the linear process of 'going to university at eighteen'. Furthermore, my cohort consisted of many students from public schools[4] and it was evident that I didn't speak their language. They could pronounce theorists' names with ease, whereas

[4] In the UK, 'public' schools are fee-paying schools, outside of the state system.

I stumbled over each syllable. They joined cheerleading teams and social groups, talked politics and complained about having to undertake menial domestic tasks. I felt isolated. I felt that I had no real experiences. When it became obvious that I had taken what they saw as a 'non-traditional' route to university (arriving more than two years after completing compulsory education), I had to think quickly. I had always had paid-employment during my studies, so I concocted a lie about taking a gap year in order to work full-time and save up some money. It seemed incredible to me that anybody could go to university—or even be a functioning adult—without earning the wherewithal to do so, so there was some veracity to my cover story. But they looked at me with pity. I hadn't realised how what I'd said had once again exposed me as an outsider. I slunk away during Freshers' Week amidst their irate talks about the government's Educational Maintenance Allowance and how unfair it was that not everybody could receive it. My 'big city' location had just started to feel familiar but now I was out of place once more.

In my second year at university, my father succeeded in taking his own life. It was meticulously planned and the method he chose meant that death was inevitable. I received a phone call from my half-sister. 'Trevor has killed himself', she said in a matter of fact tone. I can't express the sense of destruction and sheer grief I experienced during that phone call. We'd had a wonderful relationship, my dad and I, despite his inability to communicate his feelings verbally. But as devastating as it was, his death did not come as a great shock. He had sent texts in the lead up to that day which suggested he was not of sound mind, and I had considered going to visit him after recognising those same patterns of behaviour from his first attempts. University deadlines before the Christmas break were looming so I decided to postpone the visit. My regret for that decision added to the constant ache I carried around for some years afterwards, leading to a spiral of self-destruction.

The immediate impact was that I once more felt I could not continue with my studies. I did not keep his death a secret. The need to tell someone, anyone, was bursting out of me. I hoped that sharing it might dissolve some of the intensity, but it had the opposite effect. I was living with six university friends at the time and although I had started to find acceptance in some social groups, this tragedy further highlighted the

difference between me and my peers. Many did not want to talk about it. Some simply could not. I understand now that it was not just his death, but the nature of his death that was taboo and evoked all sorts of unanticipated feelings in those I told. Suicide makes people wince and recoil. It's like an infectious disease that many want to ignore. And it once again made me an outsider among the people I shared my environment with. I found that I couldn't endure the painful attempts at conversation when passing through the kitchen. I deferred for a year and moved out of the student house.

Death, a Catalyst

I spent most of the following year in isolation, working shifts in retail to pay my rent and trying to avoid communicating with anybody. But this time, I knew that I had to return to education, not least because another English lecturer intervened to make sure I did so. Why did she go out of her way like this? I had not to my knowledge written anything outstanding in my first year of university and I had been painfully quiet during seminars. I am still perplexed by her intervention—but also forever grateful. As I had effectively missed a year as a result of my deferral, I did not know anybody on the course on my return. I preferred this and relished the privacy and focus it gave me to work on pieces for my first creative writing portfolio. I took my lecturers' advice—I wrote what I knew. I had never seen any value in my experiences before this point. After all, I was twenty-one and had spent most of my life trying to fit in and adapt around others. But it was the first anniversary of my father's death and I was consumed by it. The portfolio came back. Not only had someone written the number '80' on the front (an unprecedentedly high mark), but there was a feedback comment too: 'You should submit these for publication'. I looked at my lecturer. I asked if he had actually intended this to go on *my* work. He nodded. He looked a bit bemused by the question. Educators had believed in me before and shown it through kindness and encouragement, but I had not believed it to be true of myself. I left elated. And motivated to achieve more. I wanted to ensure that I did not let anybody down. The following year, I graduated with first class honours

and a distinction for my dissertation. Many of the friends I eventually made, however, with whom I am still in contact, still do not know the truth about my 'gap year'.

I never had any aspirations to achieve anything higher than my undergraduate degree but after graduating I was encouraged to pursue a Master of Arts in Creative Writing. I was awarded a place in my home institution but decided to apply for a 'Russell Group'[5] university weeks before the course was due to commence—just to see if I could get an interview, not for one moment thinking they would let me study there. I got an interview. It was disastrous. The panel asked what book had made an impact on my life. '*Junk*', I said (young adult fiction by Melvin Burgess, which narrates the journey of two young runaway heroin users in the eighties). That didn't seem to go down too well so I hurried on to cite Julian Barnes and to talk about a Romanticism module I had taken during my second year as an undergraduate. No response. I left feeling mortified.

When the course began just weeks later, the majority of my small cohort already knew one another. They had already studied together at this very university. They wore matching lacrosse and rowing team hoodies with their leavers' dates printed on the back. They asked where I had studied for my first degree and seemed disappointed with my response. I felt self-conscious about my past achievements and in that second, the euphoria I had experienced since being offered a place died. I pulled my sleeve down to cover my tattoo. I took off the 'statement' ring I was wearing (a dice with the word 'classes' on each side) and put it into my bag.

I muddled through my MA, but I felt dejected for much of it. My style of contemporary writing was different to others. They were well-read and had time to devour all of the texts we were set since unlike me, they were largely unemployed. Weekly workshops left me dispirited as I felt that nobody had understood what I had tried to convey in my writing and I started to believe that this was not the place for me. When I received the news by email that a piece of my writing, written during a writing retreat, had been published and commended for an award, one of my lecturers turned and pointed an accusatory finger at me. 'You?' he asked incredulously. I questioned myself. Had I read the email correctly?

[5] A small group of 'élite' research-intensive universities.

Fortunately, my dissertation supervisor was supportive and encouraged my writing. Sometimes during our meetings she also made random remarks that referred not only to her own family background but to the fact that she also came from a certain area of Bristol—a signal which I interpreted as intending to reveal her working-class status growing up, despite her current soft, well-spoken accent. I realised why one day, as we were discussing my family background, in relation to one of my dissertation pieces. She knew about my father's suicide but was obviously stunned when I mentioned that he had been a head teacher. 'Your dad? He was a head teacher? I had no idea!' Her voice trailed off and the room went silent. I pondered her response and whether I had been perceived as a 'diamond in the rough', somebody to be 'saved'. I realised that the way I spoke and where I was from played only a part in how people had come to associate me with a particular class. The mental health of my father had also become 'read into' my own identity—seen as a constituent part of my perceived class status, as if serious mental illness and 'working classness' are synonymous—my supervisor's surprise arising from the idea that a high achieving, intelligent (and therefore middle-class) individual could not have taken their own life. The conversation was an epiphany. I completed my MA and left with a distinction for my dissertation, which explored mental health and bereavement. I did not attend my graduation ceremony the following year.

Second Chances

After my MA, I trained as a post-compulsory-education lecturer and I now teach English in a sleepy seaside town, commuting for three hours each day. It would be far easier and more economical to find employment closer to home, but I am drawn to the area and the nature of the learners. Perhaps I have inherited my father's educational philosophy. Over 50 per cent of our cohorts are considered vulnerable, largely due to the low socio-economic profile of the town, and as a result, many of them have no aspirations or motivation to achieve. Few can envisage a future beyond the Grand Pier or the derelict town centre and some have confided that leaving the town is not a choice for them. It's a narrative I've lived through

and I hope in time to be able to challenge it and change their perceptions of what their destinations might look like rather than what they assume it should be. I use my own experiences with my students where appropriate, and I provide that same pastoral care which enabled me to make those transitions to recognising that I was a 'clever girl' all along and am now a clever woman.

Despite my attempts to adapt and use a protective camouflage throughout my educational journey, I feel more at ease here on the 'other side' of the educational fence from my younger student self. Perhaps I needed the affirmation that the title 'teacher' confers, that I am intelligent, that I can achieve and that I am worthy of the responsibility of facilitating others' endeavours. Of course, the role is not without its own anxieties in a system which has institutionalised constant scrutiny of one's performance. Can I ever be an 'outstanding' lecturer according to external measures? I have to differentiate between apprehensions arising from my desire to carry out my role to the best of my ability and those which might be rooted in my own educational experiences. Sometimes I feel that I am constantly chasing perfection in the classroom, where it does not (should not?) exist. I voiced these concerns during a recent appraisal. My manager turned to me. 'Your problem', she said, 'is that you are a very clever girl – and you need to start believing it'. It was the first time in my adult life that these words had been applied to me.

Perhaps seeking acceptance, trying to 'fit in', will always be a feature in my life but maybe working in what is referred to as the 'second chance' sector could provide me with that feeling more than I had ever realised possible. Perhaps it offers a second chance to some staff as well as students. Like my father, I may now be perceived by some as embodying the stereotype of the middle-class professional. I don't relate to that or feel its truth. Complex links between social class (however its assumed indicators are perceived, ascribed, held on to or transmitted); mental health; and educational achievement have played out in my story in patterns that I am only beginning to be able to discern as I retrospectively scan the geographic, linguistic and emotional landscape of the hills and valleys I've traversed. My choice to work in this particular area and the attachment I have to its community have provided me with a familiarity that has always been absent elsewhere. Here, I no longer have to hide behind an accent or converse ambiguously when referring to my education or background. It's a kind of coming home.

19

Clever Girls in Conversation

Jackie Goode

LIZ Reading each chapter and hearing your voices through your words, I have cried and laughed, held my breath in horror, screamed with rage. I feel a deep desire not miss any of you out as I tell of what my feelings are about your writing. Why? Because I've heard your pain when you were 'missed out' in your life, when you were an outsider, rejected. This deep desire to belong is an abiding leitmotif in all our writing. The flip side of belonging is being an outsider: the oppressive otherness in all our writing. I felt this most strongly where race was considered.

Here is some of what I found powerful, poignant and evocative in your words. A whole picture in brief phrases: Emily's 'PVA and antibacterial soap' smells from her nurturing primary school, yet by eighteen she had broken down and 'grief poured out of me like black tar'. Meena 'gripped the purity and truth of my intention tightly' as she recognised she was not a victim but successful. Jan's powerful statement: 'Education and privilege offer the opportunity to walk away (from your past) with a few simple "deletes" of the privileged academic researcher's typewriter keys'. I

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smiled at Melanie's elation after a breakthrough lecture—'This lecturer should be made available on the NHS'—and felt her power as she descended the steps of the Radcliffe Camera to retrieve the good side of nineteenth-century working-class women and set the record straight for those with 'ancestral wit and cleverness' yet 'hidden from history'. I sweated for Nell as she made her half-time football report, knowing that her father's reputation might be at stake and still doubting her ability; Claire's sadness at not getting the break her qualification and her mum's before her, deserved; Tracey's lines 'I do believe that sorrow is in my blood'; the agony for Sarah's mum when she lost the school report made me catch my breath. I felt rage and anger seeing Victoria witnessing the 'silence'—that place that no-one filled with comment or discussion after some 'uneasy truths about British absentee slave ownership' had been voiced. For Christa, too, who knows the silence well—her conference slot on African Caribbean women and trauma was left hanging in it, leaving her feeling 'shut down and shamed'. Finally, thanks to Tracey for the power of her final paragraph and in particular her plea for readers '…who will refuse linearity and embrace the fluidity of our pasts as well as our futures; who will allow, as they reach this arbitrary ending, that somewhere out there, the person who wrote these words has moved on; that she is no more, and that she is still becoming'. Thank you all for the stories you chose to tell and the hope inherent in the possible futures that may come after.

NELL Reading all of your pieces has been like … being let loose in the most wonderful library where, as in all libraries, you find echoes of yourself alongside thoughts and ideas and experiences you might never otherwise have encountered and are much richer for it. I loved the nuance and detail of all the pieces. Each one felt like being invited in and guided around the inside of so many experiences, mapping them out—look, here the sore places, here though, look at what I did, what I made, who I've become. And now, look at what we are all doing here together in this collection. I think what we have produced here is utterly amazing. I've felt so trusted in reading these pieces. … I've been in tears, I've felt viscerally shocked (sadly, not in a surprised way), I've laughed, learned, remembered, felt empathy and connection around big things and small.

Christa's experience of how the all-white/predominantly white groups she was presenting her work to lacked 'the willingness to endure the psychological and intellectual demands of each other's subjects'. That phrase rang like the finest of rallying calls for me—made me want to re-commit to being able to do that and to hope that these pieces will be part of that important work. Tracey's reflection that 'controlled disclosure is a way of staying safe' felt like another banner for this collection. Sarah's reflection that 'It can be hard to take risks when you're used to having just enough and nothing spare … not just money but cultural capital and confidence too' felt like healing sense-making and granted a bit of self-forgiveness. Jackie—at one point in your piece, I literally just shouted out *Salad Cream!* There is a lot to be said on the subject of salad cream—working class transgression of white-middle-class eating norms—but also the simple delight of salad sandwiches anointed with the Queen of the Holy Trinity of Bottled Condiments. And the parrot and the pit bull. There is a part of me that I call 'Eastwood Girl'—a kind of mythical other self or banished inner 'bad girl' (since being good as much as being clever was part of my ticket out). She has echoes of the particular kind of fighting spirit that results in various members of my family being banned from pubs and falling foul of the police. She can be summoned by (amongst other things) casual, derogatory use of the word 'Chav'… which brings to mind a line from one of my favourite songs, 'Round Here' by Counting Crows, that tells of talking just like lions, but sacrificing like lambs—a line that always brings sadness for those who never had or weren't able to take their chances to 'get out'. Sarah's mum's painful, self-lacerating 'stupid bitch' was in that thought stew too. The insidious power of internalised oppression…

… but then finding the right friends and the right adults. Meena's 'There were always angels to catch me' made me cry—as much as her brother Arun's brilliant (?!?) solution of the tea station made me laugh. Melanie pulling the true stories of those working-class mothers and nurses from behind the veil of middle-class contempt: 'We are numerate and intelligent enough to do it ourselves thank you'. When Motsabi ran out of the room—it probably didn't feel like it in the experiencing but in the reading it felt like a triumphant, courageous thing to do—an utter rejection of the unsafe place. Panya's account of the brutal beating of her

classmate—with its awful echo of slavery—stopped me in my tracks and was heart-breaking. As was the constant thread of on-street, in-school, in-friendship and in-workplace racism; Victoria's 'Is this yours?' experience; the reminders of the ways Black children were framed as being 'educationally sub-normal'. It's hard to even write that phrase. How much harder knowing it was applied to you. It reminds me of my responsibility to never fail to notice and to respond in solidarity—and never with silence. So it's been like attending summer school at the best educational establishment in the world—'The University of Intersections and Liminal Space'. Full of astonishing women—one of them even up a ship mast soldering in the cold! Aren't intersections the busiest, chattiest, most interesting and challenging places to congregate? Not marginal or displaced but *the* place to be if you want to learn. Kristin's very particular experience of discussions around the miner's strike as a Canadian daughter of a miner was one of those brilliant jewels you only get when you have access to so many different women and their stories. And I've loved being invited into people's families—not always comfortable places but an honour and an illumination to be asked in through that door. There was a point, though, when I got scared … I experienced some of the fear and overwhelm I'd experienced trying to write my piece in the first place. The 'my piece won't measure up' malarkey. And then … I let myself just purely enjoy and learn from what I was reading and I let the utter trust and generosity that shines out from these pieces hold me and I dared to read my own piece alongside everyone else's and I thought: It's okay. It deserves to be here. So, thank you for everything that this amazing reading experience has given me—Angels all.

MEL As a complete novice to autoethnography I've really enjoyed this exercise and been completely immersed in reading others' chapters, which placed me 'in' the moment of the lives lived. The searing honesty made me laugh and smile at the connections and similarities I found, not only in higher education (my own focus) but also with school experiences.

I loved it when Motsabi found her academic 'Here I am!' And when Liz's 'experiment' paid off. Jackie's passion for academic subjects and Nell's understanding of the rules of football resonated hugely with me. I

was delighted that Panya found her warrior and when Sarah found her happiness in an 'ordinary' life. Tracey was clearly able to speak twice as loud to be heard. Meena's incisive analysis that boys should do housework made me laugh and reminded me of the conversations I had at Ruskin College. Victoria's eloquence was clearly evident, as was Christa's. Kristin was being welcomed at events, while Claire questioned whether it has all been worth it. I felt disquiet about that but was heartened that Emily feels she has gone home. Education has led us to a new found middle-class status, if we want it, yet equally accommodated those of us who refused to shed our working-class selves … but with some consequences of course—I felt rage when reading about the difficulties we encountered and endured from what seemed to me to be from a raft of quarters, while we merely sought to educate ourselves … our desire to enter HE seen as 'bashing square pegs into round holes'. We seem to have endured contempt, derision and mockery … for seeking to enlighten ourselves, raise our game and provide for our families—as with the scorn endured by nineteenth century mothers, similarly wishing to raise *their* game by going to work. But I can see positive shifting sands since their narratives. Their stories had to be dragged out of them as they felt their lives mattered little to others, and that they would be vilified for telling them; we are now thankfully more willing to give our account. As Jan so beautifully places herself, her mum and nan in history. Today we see the import of raising *our* voices—and our heads above the parapet—to put our testimonies on record. Our education and enlightenment may not always have involved an easy 'fit' but we are who we are because of where we have been and how we got here. Our testimony relays our successes, pitfalls, triumphs and failures; they are all here for others to delve into.

CHRISTA As I type, I am filled with a feeling of joy, sharing this space with so many amazing women. Yes, that's what that feeling is—Joy! Thank you all for trusting me with your stories. Liz, thank you for the acknowledgement of *all* our work—it mattered—and it met my 'Inner Child's' need to be recognised and named. Nell, thank you for your comment—you captured my intention and as an educationalist this is one of the main reasons why I agreed to being part of this important work.

Through reading all the writings I have understood the importance of referencing who has gone before us on our journey. Early in my studies, references were merely used to name-drop, show off, prove that I knew the right people to read; but now I fully embrace the tradition of 'singing the names of those (we respect) who have gone before us' as the calypso and rappers continue to do in their performances.

There's so much to write about, reading our lived experiences: Jan's resounding declaration of giving a voice to silenced women who have earned their place in our Mystories; Melanie's acknowledgement of our heritage; and Panya's recognition that our being clever may simply be our soul work resonated with me. I recognised the strength of all your characters and qualities that concur with my values—such as Emily's refusal to comply; and Motsabi daring to look in the mirror and ask questions she has been told not to ask, and through this, shake off what is not hers.

I like the music we are making and I want to dance!

Courage was demonstrated by each one of us, alongside resilience demonstrated by Claire; Victoria's, Meena's and Kristin's spirited persistence; and Panya's refusal to be infected by hate. We are all storytellers and, like Shawomen, this carries great responsibilities in being willing to make the journey … sometimes at the costs of our relationships, self-esteem and financial security …

Your phrase 'do your best', Liz! Was that only of our time or did it signify a certain kind of woman? Maybe there's some truth about the middle child, Panya! I am one too and have been called an Old Soul as well. What a Journey you've made. The George Best story makes sense to me now, Nell, and I can really relate to your thirst for knowledge. I wonder how it feels to have outgrown the need to please your mother, Sarah. And how it felt, for you, Jan, re-reading your writing and hearing the voices. Setting the terms of your own life, Emily—Go Girl! And Tracey, I could relate to so many of your themes. You've already put into effect what it means to be a Clever Girl, Meena—I hope you managed to rest and recuperate. And Melanie, the 'Second Chance Student'—I value educationalists like you and want to hear more of your stories… I know challenging racist abuse can leave a little scar, Kristin and I feel protective. But this is activism! I'm troubled that things have not changed much for your generation, Victoria. But you understand the 'game' and knowing

the rules means changes can happen—Go Girl! Motsabi—I find myself wondering how your dance of 'shaking it off' is going. And I could so relate to you, Claire, the struggling student, and also your mother. I now see my own naivety and the impact this had on my daughters—but my thirst for knowledge couldn't be abated and like all addicts I am still taking it one day at a time! I liked how you paid homage to your tutor, Jackie. Thank you for the trust and time you've invested in producing the best out of me. How are you feeling having gone through this process? It's been a wonderful experience collaborating with each of you to produce something which I believe will be a guide and of great value for other girls and women like us.

PANYA I gained something from each of the autoethnographies and experienced a range of emotions too, so thank you all for sharing. Writing them can be seen as what is most pertinent for us now at this moment in time. I'm sure we have lots more that we can share and say but for now 'Clever Girls' is our starting point. I'm a book lover so the first thing I zoomed in on was how our exposure to books demonstrates the importance of nurture—like Nell, who was exposed to her dad's books at home. Nell, I savoured your tender relationship with your father (having never experienced such a relationship myself). It was heart-warming to see how his life—books and football—influenced/shaped your life. And Claire, propelled into an environment of learning so young. I too had to bring my youngest daughter to university with me on occasions.

The journey to being 'clever' is one fraught with difficulties, as many of us can testify to, as with Emily whose behaviour courted questions and Tracey who decided not to speak (like me who elected to be a mute because speaking was far too painful). It was evident too how society shapes us or dares to place us in boxes, like Jackie whose family had to endure social stigma (again like me, an illegitimate child). I could relate to the shame your mother had to wear through the stigma of having a brother born out of wedlock, and I echo your relief that this way of thinking is now outmoded. The resilience we cultivate through adversity is empowering, as with you, Emily—the realisation that at such a

formative age you were being assessed and the anger that engrossed you before finding your path again.

I thought about how, as children, we become witnesses to what the status quo deems acceptable or not, as with Motsabi and the realisation that Bantu is somehow less favourable/regarded than European languages and the influence and impact that things like this have upon us and our self-esteem. And how this works hand in hand with low expectation like Victoria experienced around being Black and clever. Low expectations deny women like us the fulfilment of our potential, 'framing' girls like us as incapable of becoming clever. I thought about your heart-rending account, Christa, of trying to help but being rebuked because of your skin colour—it's something I'm familiar with and continue to try and negotiate in a world of being 'other'. And about the impact of Liz's experience of being streamed into sets so early and how that makes us feel and perform. Meena, there was so much of your experience that reminded me of my childhood—being excluded from mainstream activities, being aware, so young, of difference and how that realisation robs us of our childhood. Jan, I loved the connection you have with your mum and your maternal great grandmother, how her 'words of wisdom' permeates your life. Kristin—I thought about your response to the 'where are you from?' question. I still haven't made my peace with this mainly because I find it strange that people do not have an understanding of British history, the 1948 Immigration Act, the invitation to come and rebuild post war Britain—it's like these dots never connect. Melanie—when we are faced with situations in which we are the 'outsider', how we long to conform, and what a dilemma we face, holding onto who we are when all we want is to be us without consequences. Finally, Sarah … not making your absent father define who you are or prevent you from being who you want to be. I agree with you, Nell, about how it feels to be being invited in, guided around, noticing the sore places, the achievements, who we've become and where we all are now, together in this collection. Each of our journeys is unique, yet with so many relatable experiences, so much which we have in common, so much we share as women, as 'clever girls'—and so much more that we have to achieve.

SARAH It's such a treat to be able to share reflections on these wonderful chapters before we all get tidied and formalised into a book. I imagine us still whispering to each other between the pages, even once we're typeset and bound on a shelf. *Settle down girls! Stand up straight! You're in a library now!*

Things which have struck me about our writings:

Our bodies. The way many of us have struggled to live in our female bodies, have hurt or hidden them, judged them; the way our bodies have made our difference visible and unavoidable, a target for hatred or shame. Our 'clever' brains that can never function separate from our sexed and sexualised, racialised, aged and aging bodies. The mothers who used our appearance as a marker of their respectability and their good mothering. The need to avoid 'trollopy' nail varnish, the 'big, clumsy, greasy' bodies some of us felt we had in contrast to trim and shiny middle-class girls' bodies. I think of the way porn, largely featuring violent treatment of women's bodies, has utterly drenched young people's lives and I fear for the girls trying to exist in female bodies today. I think of the recent 4000 per cent increase in girls seeking medical treatment to become boys.

Our voices: I read our voices made visible and uniform on these orderly pages, as I am trained and accustomed to reading voices, and I hope one day to really hear us all together—our accents, dialects, laughter—those things that have again marked us out as different, either from our working-class origins or our middle-class destinations. I read here about voices that we have actively tried to change through elocution lessons or have accidentally changed through the company we keep. Accents and dialects which can connect us to our families, our heritage, our childhoods, which never entirely leave us; accents we can deploy or withhold, sometimes to connect or conform, sometimes to defy. I hear Nell shouting at the football and Melanie cheering at the rugby and I think of how rarely girls and women—perhaps particularly the 'clever ones'—get to shout, to test our voices to capacity. So much silence in these chapters, so much unsaid and unsayable, the 'dirty secrets' of racism and racialisation in schools, the shameful/shaming silence when oppression and trauma are named.

Our parents and heritage: What is it like to be the parent of a 'clever girl?' What do the mothers go through, who feel their girls separating from them in a way they maybe never did from their mothers? What rejection do they experience, and what pride? While their clever girls are out in the world, what are the mothers feeling at home? And the fathers, quietly supportive, proud or rejecting or all of these together in the soupy mass of feelings that seems to come with class or cultural dislocation. I greatly admire the writers here who talked to their parents about their experiences; I wasn't brave enough. But I'm grateful for this project for making me think more deeply about what my mother might have experienced … I related so much to the family stories of strong women, such as Panya's powerful birth story, Jan's mum, Nana and Maw. I realised how many (hi)stories I have been able to remain remote from, of slavery and migration and types of brutality my 'family stories' have never featured.

Our angels: Meena's phrase 'There were always angels to catch me' was such a delight, and I cheered inwardly for all the 'sheroes' in these chapters. Meena's superhero dinner lady and teacher, the father she could always go home to; Melanie's inspiring lecturers, Hannah in the library; 'Auntie Elizabeth' and the teachers who nurtured Liz's potential. And so many of us who are doing the same for the 'clever girls' we meet and work with. I think about the 'clever girls' who through chance, timing—or political choices and worsening structural inequality—never have a chance to meet their angels.

I think about all the moments in the chapters where books and theories and 'others like us' made us feel less isolated and strange, gave us courage and energy and validation—finding feminism, finding other working-class students, forming a group of Black psychotherapists. Something in Melanie's chapter gave me that feeling of excitement and possibility—made me want to jump up and shout 'I'm going to write a book!' And in Jackie's chapter I was so pleased to discover the source I had forgotten of the quote I've always remembered 'a hundred years ago I'd have been cleaning your shoes'. Reading this had such a powerful impact on me 30-plus years ago, knowing that I wasn't the first to feel this way, giving me words for and a wider understanding of those feelings and I've always carried the quote in my memory, like a secret friend. If some

phrase in this book helps one person feel more known, more understood, more accepted or powerful—then we've done a grand job.

JAN Beth's image of us all bound up in the book in the library, still whispering—YES!

Liz, I clap with delight when you hit Wendy—how I love your little girl boldness (because I am a wee bit of a scaredy-cat little girl) … and your logic that you must be cleverer because your name is longer (even if you've now shortened it to three letters!). Jackie—I laugh out loud when you determine to improve your memory when your mum asserts (like my mum does) that you need a long memory if you're going to lie. Ha, I think—clever girls can be naughty wee girls too! Love when you 'look through the film of your formative self'. Nell—I love how you write about making off and 'devouring' your dad's books—aren't books the most delicious things? I also saw myself in Lynsey Hanley's book. I remember my dad's love of the 'pools'—a Thursday night ritual for a man with little spending money—his treat. I fall a wee bit in love with your grandmother, Christa, when she calls you 'too womanish'; and when you quote Alice Walker's 'womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender' my heart sparkles with the beauty of this—before I recoil at the names you are called as a child. I love how you go back and rewrite history, Melanie, giving a voice and place to those nineteenth-century women—bringing those 'wallflowers' out to shine in the sun. When you, Panya, ask 'But what class was/am I when colour speaks so visibly?' I write in the margin 'This is so thought-provoking. White privilege lives and breathes behind those words' and I feel shame in my privileged white past. And your mother's desire to do well 'cloaking' you is a beautiful image. Other contributors being more at ease, Sarah? I write 'PMSL' in the margin! But then I feel a hopelessness sweep over me—which comes again with Claire's account of how things are so not as they are meant to be—there is a quiet poignancy in how you write about sitting with the general unjustness in life. And Tracey's 'sorrow in the blood' —Yes. I think we inherit many things at birth from those who come before us. And like you, I think we should refuse linearity and see ourselves in moments in time with fluid pasts that change as we become. I really dislike Joanna

Lee, Meena! But I really like your superhero dinner lady. I utterly detest your art teacher. But I love Kelly! 'Regardless of class, "race," gender and education, how can we raise the bar high enough to accommodate the unconventional path? We shouldn't have to strive so hard against the odds' you say. Yes! Kristin—for me, you articulate and capture the belonging/exclusion based on surface assumptions and raise questions about who is allowed to speak for whom with such stunning clarity. Motsabi, I really came to understand your world as two separate 'spheres' and how you negotiated this as a child and like Sarah, I admire how, as an adult, you have spoken to your parents as part of the process of writing your chapter. I am shocked by the statistics you quote, Victoria, and saddened by your notes to self. Miss Dee and all those expecting less of you? Well, here we all are—wonderful clever women—in this book! Claire, your letter to your younger self moved me, beautiful as it is in the simplicity of your telling of the realities of your life; searingly haunting too as you question the purpose of the struggling to do better and the trap of socio-economic circumstance. I am screaming 'Injustice!' And I'm appalled at you being labelled a 'saes' Emily. "Grief poured out of me like black tar. I could not escape it nor rid myself of it" – I feel the sticky-stuckness in this. But your English lecturer? I place her on the 'angel' list. Like others, I notice bodies and voices … our little girl bodies, both nourished and hurt by things that are said to us, inferred, unconsciously transmitted, things that become a part of our becoming-adult-women bodies as we are judged, policed, self-police … our embodied voices as we write leave our trace here in this space of becoming-being clever girls and women.

TRACEY I'm one of those people who finds writing difficult, and it's usually a deadline that forces me to get words onto the page but producing the chapter for this book was particularly difficult. Partly because it was a sad time, and remembering certain aspects of my past made me sadder, but also because of my lurking fear that this was all somehow … self-indulgent? My fears receded as I read the wonderful chapters, and realised how much we, the *Clever Girls* authors, had in common, despite our many differences. We had struggled to situate ourselves in relation to the expectations, positive or negative, of our parents and teachers (Liz, Panya, Jackie, Sarah, Meena, Jan, Victoria). We had learnt, or were still

learning, to negotiate the transitions between different worlds, sometimes feeling that we did not fully belong to either, but also managing to turn these difficulties into a resource, a way of making sense of the world (Liz, Christa, Melanie, Nell, Meena, Kristin, Emily). Some of us—perhaps more of us than wrote about it—still feel precarious, lacking a safety net; education has not brought economic or emotional security (Sarah, Claire).

And so many of us spoke about accents, voices, about our difficulties in speaking and being heard, as individuals but also (crucially) as women negotiating structures that extend beyond us and encompass our gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality. Working class or 'regional' accents marked some of us out at school or university (and what is a 'regional' accent, anyway? Who *isn't* from a 'region'?). Others told of losing a voice, choosing or having silence forced upon them, or the impossibility of making others hear what is being said when all they see is an 'angry Black woman'. The more I read, the more I felt the collective power of our voices; what sometimes felt like self-indulgence as I wrote had turned into something entirely different as it joined a chorus; together, we are strong. Each of our stories is powerful; but together, we are more than the sum of our parts. And we will be heard.

Postscript: I wrote my responses before reading others' contributions to the conversation. Reading our voices alongside each other again, but now actively responding to each other, I'm struck by the similarities and differences in things that we've concentrated on as we each tried to sum up the wonderful messiness and complexity of this book. What had stuck in my memory, and shaped my original comments, was the sense of injustice, anger, lack of power and struggle that we had all experienced at some point. Somehow, what had faded between my initial reading of the book, and being reminded by all your contributions, was how much I'd also laughed when reading the chapters, and how much I'd felt warmth towards you all—not just as a collective of voices raised against all those people and things that might try to keep us down, but as a group of people that I liked immensely. So I'll close by echoing some of your words of joy. I'm proud to be a student at the University of Intersections and Liminal Space (Nell). I also like the music that we are making and want

to dance (Christa). And I'm very glad that we'll still all be whispering to each other between the pages, even once we're typeset and bound on a shelf (Sarah). And thank you, Jackie, for bringing us together. This really has been a pleasure.

MEENA While writing my chapter, I was also learning how to manage my chronic fatigue. Friends and family reminded me often, '*Don't go back to your old ways of doing far too much. Just try to live an ordinary, relaxed life from now on*'. This project was even considered to be an unnecessary burden I had taken on because at times I found it difficult to think about and articulate my past in a way I had never done before. So, once I submitted the final draft of my chapter, I took their advice and surrendered, dropped everything outside of work, sat on my sofa and watched Netflix. Three months later I was invited to read others' chapters and what I read rebooted my system!

I realised that although our stories were different, our emotional experiences were the same. We each went through life experiencing the frustrations, pains, confusions and discoveries that come with being a 'clever girl'. We each described some memories with humour and affection, demonstrating the resilience we share. And at times I was able relate to others' experiences as my own for the very first time, because I'd never articulated them before, and these women did that for me.

At first, I found reading the chapters incredibly 'triggering'. I felt a pain and sadness, not for the individuals, but more for the realisation that little has changed over the generations we span; from Liz (just!) in her seventies through to Emily in her late twenties and myself somewhere in the middle. I felt frustrated thinking '*So much of our energy was wasted in navigating inequality over reaching our full potential*'. I could sense that we all faced the conundrum of foregoing our own self-expression and 'conforming' to a certain way of being if success was going to be possible; Liz marrying into upper-middle class family, Emily doubting her unique contemporary writing style, Motsabi being split by having to make a binary choice of channelling white over Black.

But as I read on, I also realised that each of us fought, persisted and grew throughout our journeys *because* of the barriers and limitations we

faced, not *in spite* of them; that there is a natural ability in each of us to rise up. I wondered, if life had been *easy*, without these barriers and limitations: 'Would my fight for life have lain dormant? Would I have become a Good Indian Girl?' My thoughts turned to Panya's question: 'What if being clever is the result of inheriting a soul that was clever before me?' I undulated from sadness to feeling inspired by a sense of purpose. I felt connected to you all in a way that I've never felt before and I understood that there are those of us who have been blessed—or burdened!—by the courage to break through our fears and strive for more—that we all have a role to play in a bigger, intangible, and natural movement towards equality. I understand now that my chronic fatigue arose from years of carrying the burden alone, of breaking through fear barriers, of being resilient to the pain of doing so. 'Clever girls' has instead given me the opportunity to laugh and cry through shared experiences, and to find comfort in the knowledge that we share the burden of this fight for equality together. In realising all of this, I switched off Netflix and found myself climbing up a BP oil rig not only to take a stand against the fossil fuel industry, but also against the elitist systems and structures that cause and maintain the inequality that we have spent our lives fighting. My fatigue remained at bay. My natural ability to fight returned. So, to all the women who wrote such beautiful articulations of their own life experiences, I want to say thank you for giving me a new lease of life, and please know that I share your burdens so that you too can continue to be awesome.

MOTSABI I too have been struck by the amount our chapters have in common and how much I recognised parts of my own experience in the many journeys you write of. The shared emotions so many of us have felt in striving for acceptance, belonging and freedom, despite the many different ways our social and socially constructed identities intersect. Reading each chapter has felt like looking through a window onto a secret world that we all experience and know well but are told by many does not really exist. Our stories have given me a sense of belonging—this was unexpected as I initially assumed I didn't belong amongst you (fighting thoughts like *I'm not an 'academic'/'writer'… I'm not good at grammar… I'm not conventionally 'clever'… It's mainly race that comes up for me – is that relevant?… I don't feel like I belong in any class…*) Despite

this I have found 'echoes of myself' in all your pieces, as well as 'ideas and experiences' I 'might never otherwise have encountered' but feel 'much richer for it' (Nell). Here are just a few of the many lessons I took from them.

Liz—Despite commencing 50 years earlier, many elements of your story felt familiar. You reaffirmed to me that true acceptance and belonging 'isn't about accent or the status such things are seen to confer. Nor is it about whatever the contemporary "signifiers" are'; a welcome reminder to my younger self. Jackie—You gave language to the 'psychosocial space between two class locations' that I feel I live in too. You explained the power accent has in this and spelled out the relative (but not complete) safety that can be found in silence, helping me understand why I often choose it too. Nell—The story of you and your dad taught me that loss is a normal part of transition. You also offered hope and inspired me to look out for those 'spaces where that uncomfortable binary-ness' can disappear. Christa—you have taught me more about experiences of Black women who came before me whilst simultaneously preparing me for the racial discrimination that remains today in those spaces I would assume to be 'safe'. Your ending reaffirmed that there is no 'right way' that class, race and gender are meant to intersect. I take this as an invitation to drop the shame I feel about my own identities. Melanie—Thank you too for confirming how 'inappropriate' we can be made to feel by merely speaking and how unsafe our accents can be. Your affirmation of this helped soothe my childhood fear that this was in my head. Your piece also grounded me by highlighting the existence of the many inspirational women that went through versions of our journey before us. Panya—Your many 'moments of strength' in the face of such violence gave me strength. Your phrase 'elective mute' made me think of choosing silence (which I often do) as a form of resistance. Your poem *Speak!* spoke powerfully to me and the younger self that I carry within. Sarah—I related to the exhausting sense of having to prove something to everyone else, the freeing options feminism highlighted and your gradual letting go. Your journey gave me direction. Jan—you reminded me how much of our stories are anchored in the stories of those who came before us, how tenuous 'success' can feel and the how hard it is to let go of the 'angst'. I found

this grounding and humbling at the same time. Tracey—you taught me to be forgiving of the girl inside 'doing her best' and reassured me that I was not alone in the 'sense of separation, splitting, and disassociation' I also felt 'living in two worlds and belonging fully to neither'. You spelled out why my own struggles with accent are valid. Meena—you gave me a context—'Issues of class and social mobility are complex for me as for all children of immigrants' —and you set a goal for me—'The trick for me moving forwards is to learn how to navigate through life to reach my potential, without draining my energy by trying too hard to prove my worth'. Kristin—you spelled out the loyalties, alliances, code switching and impossible choices at play in answering the oh-so-familiar question of 'where are you *really* from'. I too feel othered by this and torn between othering others and feeling othered myself. You also explained to me why this feels so heightened in today's political context and accompanying narratives. Victoria—You gave language to strong daily feelings I share with you: 'It is the girl in me who often experiences a lack of confidence or assuredness about her place in a privileged institutional space'. You spelled out why I so often feel disloyal: 'working class is inflected by being Black in Britain' and why I don't need to: 'In many ways, to be Black is to be "classed" by default, resulting in a kind of lumping-together of different kinds of "otherness". But lived experience is more complicated than that'. Claire—you played back the same exhaustion I feel in my own attempts to 'jump through a series of needless hoops in order to prove' myself. You also reminded me not to be so judgemental of my own internalisation of social stereotypes and the impact it continues to have on my self-esteem. Emily—you inspired me to find a 'coming home' space where I too 'no longer have to hide behind an accent or converse ambiguously when referring to my education or background'. Thank you.

Thank you all.

KRISTIN Reading all (y)our stories has been an intensely moving and reflective experience. Like Panya, I am from a large family and often cultivate my own companionship over that of others. I have a lot of casual friends but over the years I have put up a guard that has prevented me from having 'soul-bearing' conversations with all but a very few. Although

I have not met any of you, I feel a sort of kinship with you all. As Nell said, it's been the most enormous privilege to get a glimpse of your private worlds. Furthermore, the process of reflecting on my own experience alongside all of yours has given me the strength I really needed during a difficult period of writing for my PhD, so I want to thank you all for your 'virtual' support and solidarity.

When I first started my chapter, I was focused on the structural elements of class experience, but this process has made me reflect on myself far more than I could ever have expected. I deeply connected with Liz's experience as the youngest child who was 'never any trouble', who wanted to 'soothe [my parents'] worries and assuage any disappointments'. As an adult, it's a position I strive to fulfil, still not having outgrown 'the need to please my mother', to use Christa's phrase, even at 35! But when our political values are so different, it's a position I am often at odds with, feeling a moral obligation to challenge throw-away comments that epitomise the small-town views of my childhood home. Reconciling this while maintaining a strong sense of where I come from is tricky but sharing our experiences has given me new perspectives on this. I also recognise the difficulty Liz experienced growing up in recognising her own working-class identity. In Canada, class is a much less obvious social category. My own 'class-becoming' really occurred when I encountered true middle-class privilege on arriving at university in my late twenties and early thirties. Mel's experience at Oxford regarding fashion rang so true to me, as did Jan's reflections on working-class bodies, while Motsabi's observations about code switching, regarding the ways we construct ourselves to others, really made me reflect on that. Is it a bad thing that we change ourselves for others, I wondered, or is it a powerful skill we've acquired which sometimes allows us to move between worlds, holding not an identity, but *identities?*

Like Sarah, when asked to write a chapter for this collection, I wasn't sure I had anything useful to say, but as with Nell, I found reading all our chapters together made me feel like I did belong. Like Meena, I was also asked by those that care about me whether I was taking on too much—but the gifts you have all given through sharing your story has made my burden lighter, and I want to thank you all for that. I especially want to

thank Jackie for bringing us all together, for encouraging this sort of dialogue that (although I am new to publishing) I don't think often exists. What you've done is powerful.

One of the most powerful messages I have taken away from this experience and seek to apply to my daily life is about how to be an ally to others. As I progress into ever more privileged positions of power within the academy, it is a lesson I hope I never forget.

VICTORIA Reading through the pieces I was struck by the level of openness that so many of the contributors show. If there's one thing that I take away from them as a whole it is a sense of the importance of being blunt and uncompromising about our experiences, being willing not to downplay them, or to reinscribe the oppressive hierarchies of knowledge and selfhood that we negotiate every day.

Kristin's mention of 'Englishness' versus Britishness is something that felt very relevant to me. It never ceases to intrigue me how myself and so many others I know who also come from immigrant backgrounds wouldn't really be caught using the word to describe ourselves by choice. As Kristin mentioned, 'it is not enough to simply live in England to be regarded as English; it is a discursive category with conceptions of race and language at its core'. Without ever having been taught this, it feels like something I have always known somehow. Although Britishness—with its sense of empire, class and hierarchy—already feels exclusive, Englishness automatically feels all the more specific. It sits in the driver's seat at the very heart of Britishness and is all the more uncomfortable to outsiders.

Continuing along the more wearable identity of Britishness, one thing that feels very 'on-brand' is the use and experience of silence and passivity as a marker of power and a means of social or epistemic violence. It isn't often perceived as either of these, but I do think it's the other side of the 'politeness' that Brits are so typically known for. And it does a specific kind of damage. In Panya's chapter, we see the unrelenting racist sadism witnessed during her time at school, through the kind of clear, loud brutality that stops us in our tracks via description alone. In Christa's chapter, on the other hand, the violence takes on a quieter form, in the shape

of the deafening void she's met with professionally, when presenting her interest in 'African Caribbean women and trauma'.

It was heartening to read this account shared by Christa as it matches so many of my own when vocalising the uncomfortable realities of anti-Blackness in white spaces. Her mention of an inner conflict—that 'nagging feeling that it was [her own fault] for needing to be acknowledged and affirmed by a white community that dehumanises [her]' —feels so central to the feeling of being met by a non-response. While it doesn't end the silences we meet when we speak freely, sharing our experiences within safe spaces confirms to us that it's not just in our heads, and that the bravery of our voices is not the problem.

CLAIRE When I was first asked to contribute to 'Clever Girls' I was excited but apprehensive. Firstly, I have never written so creatively and personally before. I've always been pretty good at writing academic papers, but in these, there is very little of yourself in the work. It was a daunting prospect to put myself out there and do something I had never really done before. When reading everyone's chapters I was struck, like Victoria, by how open and honest everyone has been in their contributions. After all, it's a vulnerable position to put ourselves in, especially since, as others have pointed out, in academia there has typically been a need for working-class women to change themselves 'to fit the mould'. Instead we are laying ourselves bare and showing everyone what we are really made of! Panya, I felt so angry at the teachers you had to endure at school. Emily, I was sad you felt like an outsider for so long—this is something I can empathise with. Melanie, I was empowered by your journey of discovery of our working-class heritage and humbled by Jan, as I was reminded how much our own stories are anchored in and take root from the family that came before us.

Secondly, I was apprehensive as my story so far does not have a happy ending. I felt that it would be expected of me to bring this to the 'happy' conclusion that people expect when reading a book. I'm sure people would also prefer to read that today things have changed and that social mobility is much easier. I have a lot of feelings of anger towards my situation and that's not what people really want to hear. I didn't want to 'let

the book down'. However, I realised that it was important to speak my truth—as you have all done, too.

Lastly, I think the biggest fear for me in agreeing to take part was that I felt like a fraud for accepting this 'clever girl' status. I have never truly felt clever despite my academic achievements. I thought, surely, I would be exposed as an imposter in a group of *real* clever girls. However, it was reassuring that others like Panya, Motsabi and Sarah have also felt this way. Though, isn't it such a shame that we still struggle to accept this status, despite all our hard work and efforts?

As mentioned by others, I have been shocked and comforted to see so many similarities in our experiences. We may have come from different generations, places and upbringings yet some themes keep reoccurring. What stood out for me was how often we feel, as working-class girls, that we must change ourselves to fit in. Otherwise, we feel like outsiders. For instance, hearing that something as natural as the accents we acquire has caused others like Liz and Emily to feel inadequate is truly sad. However, it was something I did relate to, and something I felt myself, in my teenage years, to the point that I now speak very differently from the rest of my family.

It also struck me how others, like myself, have used education to escape the difficult things in life. It has been used almost as a form of escapism, something that you can 'get your head stuck into' and that can be controlled, unlike most other things in life. Especially as children, this seemed to bring appeasement from parents who might have been going through a lot at the time. I wonder if this was at our expense or to our benefit, in the end?

I have been moved in so many ways by you all and I have been honoured to be able to take a glimpse into all your lives as clever girls!

EMILY I grew up devouring words printed on the page. These were usually stories of fiction about characters' lives, and how they navigated through their different realms with ease and 'owned' each space they inhabited—similar to Nell's experience of having limited reading material about 'gorgeously elusive rich girls. No particular role models there for a clever girl/tomboy'. It wasn't until I reached my early twenties that I realised I was sometimes unable to relate to any of *their* worlds. There was

escapism in that, for a while, but these chapters have been another sort of 'coming home' experience. I recognised the difficulties. I resonated with some of the frustration(s). I felt triumphant when achievements—explicitly and implicitly—were accomplished. I too echo the gratitude for trust, already woven through this conversation, in letting me read your stories and inhabit [y]our familiar spaces.

I identified profoundly with Claire's awareness of her 'status' in society and lack of experience compared to her peers at both school and university, and that left me with a lingering sadness. The weight of those expectations, by ourselves and/or others, to achieve both in and after higher education was evident in many of the contributions, especially poignant where Sarah reveals her mother's horror at her 'giving up' academia, which had contributed to her depression—mental health struggles seemed to be all too familiar in our stories of striving to please and to keep up with peers. But Tracey's unapologetic statement 'I am who I am: here I stand, I can stand no other' and comments about the different kinds of 'beginnings' gave me encouragement to 'keep on keeping on', and I will remember her words during those times of self-doubt. Jan's background of coming from a long line of 'strong women' and Motsabi's recognition and appreciation of her parents allowed me to re-evaluate my own relationship with my mother, and to reflect on her words of encouragement—even if they are not always conventional. Similarly, I recognised Liz's teacher, Mr. Evans, in my own experiences of education. He shows tactful kindness, identifying that she is not just a 'difficult' child. We need more teachers—more people—like him. Victoria's hesitation before answering a class-directed question and queries by Miss Dee of whether the work she has produced is truly hers only confirm this. Panya's admission that she had 'cultivated a strength of character that exhibited itself in an independent nature, enabling me to venture into unknown territories with courage' accentuated her power and resilience, so that despite the horrific racism and abuse, she 'refuse[d] to regurgitate the hate that was injected inside [her]'. Christa's similar experiences of education enraged me and, like Jan, I felt 'shame in my privileged white past' and for being unfamiliar with these abhorrent experiences within the education system and other spaces.

Throughout the contributions, accents and voice are also frequently tied up with exclusion in some form: Melanie's broad Yorkshire accent 'left [her] exposed' and misrepresented by stereotypes in popular culture, Jackie's references to 'apparently talking posh' even without her big sisters' elocution lessons and Kristin's accent 'serv[ing] as a marker of my difference', depending on the social environment she is in at the time. Although it is heartening to hear that she is 'welcomed' by many, this is not always for the right reasons, leaving her in an 'acceptance limbo', not fully belonging. I found myself nodding and unable to hide a smile as I read Meena's story, and how she doesn't identify as '… a victim. I'm successful', now accepting the expectations placed on women bound into their culture(s). Acceptance is often used as something negative, a making do. However, my interpretation is that Meena has complete control over her decisions, and her achievements, past and present, speak volumes.

It has been an absolute honour and pleasure to read your stories and hear the resilience in your voices. Thank you, Clever Girls.

JACKIE I wasn't planning on joining in at this point, having had earlier conversations with you all along the way, but I have to thank you for the kind comments you've made about my 'steering the craft' as Ursula Le Guin calls it, when 'sailing the sea of story'. I also want to answer the question Christa asks me about how I am feeling having gone through this process. Honestly, I feel so privileged that you all joined me. Reading your stories took me on the same kind of roller coaster that you have all described, modified for me not only by the fact that I was encountering them over a more extended period as individual chapters came in but by my reading them through different kinds of lenses—which meant that I veered between being impressed and excited by your writing, thinking 'Wow, that's such a brilliant contribution to the book – how fantastic!' and being moved by a range of personal emotions from anger and shame to sadness and back again, despairing at points when you communicated painful experiences so powerfully and as I reflected on how little some things have changed and how far there is to go. But then, like others, I also really appreciated the wry humour, the inclusion of those 'angelic' moments and the minor and major triumphs, so that I became increasingly uplifted personally—and 'professionally' I became increasingly

conscious of the responsibility I felt towards you all to do my best to get your stories 'out there'. A number of you speak of trust and that has been such an important element in this whole project. Mutual trust, given and reciprocated; trust that it was a worthwhile endeavour and that together we would 'pull it off'. Actually, it came as no surprise that it was Christa who posed the question, since it was she who admonished me, as I was in the process of writing the book proposal and inviting contributors, whenever I said or wrote '… if I manage to do this…' 'There's no *if* about it', she asserted, 'You *will* do it!'

Well *I* didn't—but *we* did. Aren't we the clever girls?

20

Conclusion

Jackie Goode

The aim of this final chapter was to reflect on the potential of bringing diverse autoethnographic voices together for illuminating: the lived experiences of intersections of class, gender and ethnicity as experienced by three generations of 'clever' girls/women; notions of transition, 'liminality', becoming and imaginings of what it might mean to be 'ordinary'. And to review the aim of the project as a whole to create a space of 'belonging', a contribution to what Lewis (2009a) referred to as a 'community-in-the-making' where a dialogue 'despite and through' differences might be possible—a dialogue that expands "what is deemed legible and comprehensible" (p. 8).

The narratives in this collection, whether adopting a traditional 'academic' style of writing or not, align with the key features of 'analytic' autoethnography as proposed by Anderson (2006), in that authors: are full 'members' of the social worlds they are examining; employ reflexivity; are highly visible in their own accounts; include a 'dialogue' with others beyond the self; display a commitment to theoretical analysis, even where this remains implicit, and are certainly evidencing what Anderson

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describes as "a spiraling refinement, elaboration, extension, and revision of theoretical understanding" (p. 388). But they also display the narrative fidelity to the writer's subjective experience that Anderson sees as characteristic of evocative autoethnography, demonstrating that the two are not mutually exclusive.

It seems to me that the decision not to confine contributions to those who were the first in their family to go to university was vindicated first of all by accounts of the complex intersections of class, gender and ethnicity rooted in 'immigrant stories'—like those of Motsabi Rooper, Meena Rajput, Victoria Bulley and Kristin O'Donnell. As Victoria said, "In many ways, to be Black is to be 'classed' by default, resulting in a kind of lumping-together of different kinds of 'otherness'. But lived experience is more complicated than that", especially when "originating from an immigrant background often entails the loss of family support networks and connections, constituting a rupture in continuity which can persist through and impact upon generations of children raised here". For her, the impact of low expectations from her teachers despite having been identified as a high achiever included a reflex of "always stepping aside".

Kristin's vignettes, set in the contexts of alternating work identities (supermarket employee and academic researcher) illuminated other 'lines' of complexity, through uncovering the dynamic ways identities are constructed in situ—at work in the supermarket, her ethnicity as a young *white* immigrant from Canada gave her 'honorary' status as "not *really* foreign"; in a situation where she stepped in to hold perpetrators of racist speech to account, however, she immediately lost her status as a 'native'. In a post-Brexit environment, Kristin's contribution, like those of 'Windrush children' Panya Banjoko and Christa Welsh, raised important questions about intersections of class, gender and ethnicity in the constitution of citizenship and national identity.

Unlike Panya and Christa, however, Kristin was under no pressure to learn to speak differently, in the way they were encouraged to abandon their Mother Tongue. But her indeterminate accent as a Canadian made it more difficult to 'place' her in class terms, resulting on occasion in being stripped of her own working-class heritage by suggestions from academic colleagues from working-class backgrounds that she is not entitled to speak of/from working-class experience. For Panya, on the other

hand, excoriating experiences of racism led her to ask, "What class was/am I when colour speaks so visibly?" She drew on the realm of the spiritual—on "forces beyond the self, things beyond conception or understanding, things which cannot be evidenced, the extraordinary and the unfamiliar, the unobservable and the unmeasurable"—to account for the resilience she developed in the face of her experiences and the status she has achieved as an established writer, performance poet and doctoral student.

Class wasn't a primary concern growing up for Meena either, for whom culture and caste were powerful shaping influences. Class came onto the agenda later for her—in the shape of more privileged friends who modelled an entitlement to choose one's own path in life. And for Christa, growing up initially in Grenada, status within the community was more salient than class or colour; it was contradictory experiences with both white and Black peers and colleagues in the UK that brought both ethnic identity and class sharply into focus for her. Her choice to identify now as a middle-class Black woman is a political one, she told us.

As well as her stories of childhood encounters with white fears of the Black 'Other' and the struggles and sense of alienation involved in making sense of and 'internalising' the negative impact of these encounters, her chapter illustrated the operation of what Meghji (2019) calls a 'racialized interaction order' in professional settings. Through mobilising their 'practical knowledge' of racial stereotypes (termed 'white ignorance' by Meghji) in 'creative' ways, he suggests, white professionals re-articulate these representations in workplace interactions with their Black colleagues in order to make them appear more covert and acceptable. Her account of professional experiences echo McKenzie's (2012) work (highlighting how West Indian women's affective relations of love and care provide respect and value that can be drawn upon to undermine the 'othering' arising from a misrecognition and pathologising of their caring practices) and Lewis's (2013) experiences at an academic conference. Sadly, she met with such misrecognition even within a professional therapeutic setting. What happens when *care* professionals' 'creative' efforts fail? Christa's account suggests that a resounding silence ensues—a silence that when challenged forced an admission of ignorance in a literal as well as a symbolic sense.

The decision not to be limited by one-dimensional criteria (parental educational status or occupation) for identifying those who have developed an enduring class sensibility was also vindicated by illustrations in contributors' stories of the intergenerational transmission of parental 'structures of feeling'—and the influence of such transmission on children's formation of what Hey (1997) calls a hyphenated subjectivity. As Barnwell (2019) observes in work on family secrets, "families, as spaces of social reproduction, can become instruments in perpetuating the structural inequalities and discriminations of earlier political eras" (p. 6). The ways that family stories originating in our parents' and grandparents' own biographies can act as 'scripts' that shape us were illustrated in a mother's childhood shame and her desire for more than respectability, in my own chapter; in Liz Thomas's mother's rebuttal of *her* mother's stricture that "It's a waste o' time educatin' a girl", her father's desire for her to "make me proud" and her grandfather's instruction to her to "Go on, me lass. You show 'em!"; in the advice from Christa's grandmother and her father to ignore 'them fool people' who subjected her to racist 'othering'; in the stories told to Panya of how she came into the world, how she was 'the stone the builder rejected' and of being told to 'mind her business' when she sought the truth behind a family secret; in the script Sarah Ward was handed of being 'the one good thing' in her mother's life; in Jan Bradford's family's birth stories, knitted together into the 'long line of strong women' she joined, accompanied by injunctions not to forget where she came from; in the pressure Meena was under from the women in her family to conform to cultural norms; and in the accounts of the impact on Emily Green, Nell Farrell and Motsabi Rooper of their fathers' unresolved 'uprootedness' from their own origins.

In Motsabi's case, "the hidden layers of internalised inferiority" that lay in wait for a father who had been educated into an institutionalised system of racial hierarchy and segregation under the apartheid regime in South Africa led him to defer to what his white wife could offer their daughter, as someone perceived as having all the 'right' credentials. But was she her parents' "transition, their project, their ticket into the post-race, post-class world that they were hoping the creation of a 'clever' dual heritage girl would produce?" Her chapter is reminiscent of Lewis's (2009b) eloquent, loving and painful autobiographical 'letter' which tells

of how she and her mother "danced sameness and difference all the time … navigating the external and internal landscapes of racial difference" (p. 21).

In Nell's case, her father bequeathed her "a space where [an] uncomfortable binary-ness disappears"; while for Emily Green—as for Liz Thomas—educational achievements led to 'crossing over' not only in class terms but, after successfully negotiating set-backs at school, in terms of coming 'home' to a professional identity 'on the other side of the fence', as teachers committed to maximising the opportunities of students like them. Such was the weight of expectation on Sarah to thrill her teachers and give her mother a better future by being 'extraordinary' in terms of educational achievement and the glittering prizes it would bring, that it has taken her some years to "recognise its siren call" and to lash herself to her "happy, ordinary life" and sail on—but not without a legacy of guilt for finally giving in to wanting the best for once despite her mother still living in a council house, by taking "the middle-class Dyson plunge"—and then feeling compelled to hide the new vacuum cleaner when a family member visits. "Surely it's normal", she asked, "to hide your good fortune, be ashamed of your comfort?"

Themes of voice and silence also featured prominently in writers' stories, in both literal and figurative ways. The usefulness of place, space and movement as an analytic lens may be more obvious in relation to migrant stories (with how one speaks appearing variously, according to context, as: the pressure on Panya to lose her Mother Tongue; Christa's mother's 'speak uppity, proper English' and the 'encouragement' she received to adopt it; Motsabi's mother correcting her pronunciation; Meena's questioning, growing up, of why Moira Stewart and Krishnan Guru-Murphy on the television news sounded so unnaturally 'posh'; and the confusion engendered by Kristin's Canadian accent), but accent is referred to by others too, especially by older contributors like me, Liz Thomas and Melanie Reynolds—marking us in class terms and 'qualifying' or 'disqualifying' us thereby in different ways. For me at primary school, even without the benefit of the elocution lessons my older sisters were sent to for a short time, how I spoke apparently marked me out as a 'snob' among my peers; and regardless of the 'kitchen sink drama' era of the time, it was made clear to Liz in her drama class at college that "Regional accents are

definitely not *de rigueur*". But if we are tempted to conclude that accents have now lost their salience in class terms, more recent examples suggest otherwise: Jan told us that she was also sent to elocution lessons to be taught how to 'speak properly' and Melanie told us that even when she went to Ruskin college to study history as a mature student, her Yorkshire accent was mimicked back to her, leaving her feeling vulnerable and insecure as a northerner in the south—a feeling that returned some years later when she was required as part of her doctoral studies to teach other students in Oxford. "The only time I'd made my voice heard in a public arena was when shouting at the ref and players on the rugby touchline", she commented, and her insecurity was amplified when she overheard a middle-class student questioning the right of someone who talks like her to be teaching there at all. Eventually she employed a female version of what Loveday (2014) refers to as a 'retroactive strategy', which "enables the negotiation of gendered working-class subjectivities in the present, as well as providing a critical perspective on the future for those whose classed identities are so often rendered as 'valueless'" (p. 721); it is the historical research she did on working-class women who were not criminals or victims but activists on their own behalf that provided her with a pride in her own class identity that didn't require the erasure of her accent. Despite her experience as a displaced northerner, and notwithstanding the sociocultural bias of what Fox (2017) dubs the "Northernness Effect" (p. 56) with its embodied elements of accent and body size, the way 'regional' accents act to devalue the speaker is not as simple as a North–South divide or of generation either, as Tracey Loughran illustrated. She has never lost the south London accent that marked her out as different at the private secondary school she attended via the 'Assisted Places' scheme, but knows that it is still what many people hear when she speaks, rather than her words; that even as a senior academic "what I'm saying must not be that clever, because I don't sound like clever people should". Space, place and movement also figured significantly in Meena's and Emily's accounts of geographical moves within the UK, prompting reflections on the impact of these shifts on other kinds of dislocation and dissociation.

Where 'voice' became even more telling than accent alone, however, was when it was literally silenced. Panya's account of her elective mutism

was followed by her poem 'Speak!' Addressed to her five-year old self, it is a powerful and moving response to her earlier experience. At around the same age, after being singled out as 'a wee genius', Jan began to 'stutter'; her mother tells her, "one day with no rhyme-or-reason, you just stopped … one day you could read fluently and write well and then the next you couldn't read properly and you couldn't even hold a pencil in your hand and nobody knew why". Motsabi's story of an English lesson illustrated how the requirement to publicly speak what has become unsayable can provoke temporary paralysis. And Victoria highlighted the silence that followed when she went to the heart of the matter of who we are as a nation in these post-colonial times by suggesting to museum colleagues that these institutions must tell uneasy truths about such things as the legacy of British absentee slave-ownership. Critical incidents like these crystallise how intersections of class, gender and ethnicity come together as an 'otherness' that silences (Rollock 2012).

Tracey did not become literally mute as an adolescent uprooted from one schooling environment to another, but "knew about silence, about difficulties in articulation, about the inability to be heard". She 'wrote her pain on the body': self-harm as a way of communicating her struggles. She alerted us to the fact that an estimated quarter of 14-year-old girls in the UK have self-harmed and that brighter girls and girls from poorer families are more likely to be depressed by the time they enter adolescence, linking these statistics to her own class-based experience of the meaning of (school) work and how injunctions around 'striving' become embedded and embodied. Motsabi, too, wrote eloquently about "the messiness of adolescence" and of the "scars that strong feelings of inadequacy and depression can create on adolescent girls' bodies and minds". Others also illustrated how, early on, girls come to know themselves bodily as 'wrong' or lacking—former eating habits feature in Liz's case, ostensibly having the wrong shade of black skin in Panya's, the "fetishisation of my Afro hair" for Motsabi, having body hair in 'wrong' places for Meena, being 'fat', 'ugly', 'big', 'clumsy', 'greasy' or in other ways not conforming to prescribed notions of femininity for Tracey, Sarah and Nell. It is a model of femininity that Carter Andrews et al. (2019) argue is even more constraining for Black girls who are urged by their teachers to be more 'ladylike' by 'taming' their louder, 'undisciplined' and

'animalistic' bodies. As Tracey wrote "we always and inescapably see, speak, listen, touch, write, remember, live, within our flesh; with all its ragged histories, known only to us".

The psychiatrist Van der Kolk (2015) talks about how the body 'keeps the score'. And Kim Etherington (2003) writes, "Childhood trauma creates chaos in many people's lives and chaos can leave us speechless, voiceless and silenced. But the body, the physical foundation on which our personhood is erected (Lowen 1967) and our spirit, the essence of our uniqueness and individuality, are rarely silenced, even by trauma. Without a voice, our body finds other ways to speak for us; our spirit survives and transcends our physical body" (p. 9). What is it that working-class girls carry in and on their bodies? They become embodied performances not only of their mothers' respectability but of their hopes, dreams, fantasies and aspirations for some version of a better future—maternal needs that begin early, as illustrated in the references in these autoethnographies to dress, to always having been 'clean' and 'nicely turned out'. Alongside these, however, are references—for example, in Melanie's, Sarah's and Claire Mitchell's stories, of the way not being able to afford the 'right' clothes (or not being able when growing up to afford access to other aspects of the 'right' kind of cultural capital) can lead to social exclusion even after you've easily cleared the intellectual hurdles. Participation (and strategies to 'widen' it) are about so much more than certificated credentials (see also Mallman 2017). Nevertheless, 'achieving' credentials, 'proving' that one is worthy exerts a powerful influence.

Much has been written (for very good reasons) about women's investment in relations of care and in unpaid care work but less about their investment in other forms of work, what that comes to mean in terms of identity, what kinds of material and psychic practices and 'structures of feeling' it engenders and what the costs of investment in it are, particularly for working-class girls. Melanie's chapter gave us a historical picture of the place of 'hard work' in the lives of nineteenth century working-class women and mothers fighting for their work-based rights. Sarah surmised that she is friendly and respectful to cleaners because she herself has been one and "will never rule out being a cleaner in the future". And Tracey brought the pressures of 'hard work' up to date for educated working-class girls. "It's never done, this striving", she observed, "this

sense of having to be a bit better, of having to prove myself", leaving her wondering "What is left without the striving?" 'Nothing' was the answer Claire and her mother feared; both engaged in low-paid work alongside their studies, there was the knowledge that "everything could be taken away so quickly because there was nothing to fall back on" if they didn't keep on striving to pay the bills. This is the 'hyperconsciousness' of money that Orbe (2014, p. 202) refers to, that never completely goes away. Working hard isn't enough when the game's rigged. Written by one of the younger contributors, Claire's 'letter' highlighted the changes that have taken place since the older contributors like me benefitted not only from state aid in the form of free tuition fees and an adequate maintenance grant but very different labour market conditions. Insecurity forms the backdrop to younger contributors' 'entrepreneurial' efforts to make a 'career' for themselves. If what the striving brings is precarity, inaccessible unpaid internships, non-graduate jobs and enormous debts, it's hardly surprising that Claire questioned whether it's all worth it.

Rooted in class-based insecurity, it is nevertheless easy to see how the imperative to 'strive' can become co-opted through discourses of 'meritocracy' and 'social mobility' by a regime intent on the construction of the 'neoliberal' self, disconnected from wider structural factors, whose personal responsibility is exactly this: to 'ever strive' or else fail due to one's own 'deficits'. Tracey, Motsabi, Claire and Emily all talked of the alienation arising from an education system that required them to fit into boxes or jump through hoops in order to prove themselves worthy, of how once-loved words, books and reading lost their enchantment and of how damaging constantly chasing the unachievable can become. More shocking perhaps than disenchantment, although both have long-lasting damaging effects, was Panya's account of the beating her classmate received at school and of the racist abuse and undermining of her own capabilities she also suffered at the hands of her teachers. Both she and Christa were put into 'SEN' (Special Educational Needs) classes, while the communication of low expectations figured in Liz's, Meena's, Victoria's and Motsabi's stories, and humiliating interviews for university admission appeared in mine and Melanie's accounts. Thankfully, there were other stories—from Liz, Meena, Melanie, Emily—of rescue in times of crisis, of sympathetic dinner ladies, attentive teachers and lecturers

sensitively stepping in at crucial moments, leading to significant turning points.

Using a variety of textual forms and techniques including poetry, 'fragments', time-shifts, 'reflexive vignettes', re-constructed conversations, an imagined letter, school reports, diary extracts and other items drawing on what Tracey called an 'archive of the self', the autoethnographies also featured examples of what Jan (citing Richardson 1997) called 'writing stories' and/or what in Chap. 3 I referred to as 'poiesis'. Explicitly illustrating the idea of poiesis, Panya in particular let us in on the process of the 'making' of her poems/chapter. But others also referred to the process of writing their chapters and some of the unanticipated emotions it engendered—especially around being identified/identifying as 'clever'. In relation to my approaching her to undertake what she referred to as an autoethnographic 'journey', Panya commented that she felt "uneasy with the term 'clever' in relation to something I could be as a Black girl in England". Sarah imagined that the other contributors would be "at ease, more articulate than me and have something important to say" and admitted to feeling "angry, irrationally and just a little" that our earlier conversations had become a book proposal with requirements she didn't feel equipped to meet (although the irony of this was not lost on her). Christa told us that "reviewing aspects of my experience analytically, questioning memories and probing dispassionately to find a version of a truth evoked at times, overwhelming and conflicting emotions". Motsabi confessed that starting to write a 'chapter' for a 'book' involved "throwing off some quite basic storylines that have followed me from childhood" prompting in her "an urge to busy myself with a million other tasks that would allow me to avoid returning to the pivotal moments I carry with me and what returning to them may involve". One of the things it involved was to initiate new conversations with her parents, whose "honesty, bravery and openness to this process" she acknowledged in a postscript to her chapter. Meena, too, who had already reached a 'reconciliation' with her mother after earlier conflicts nevertheless shared what she was writing with her, and her chapter ended with a wry and touching shared moment between them about Meena's late father. My own chapter allowed me to explore some of the reasons for the conflicted relationship I had with my mother, to acknowledge "the class and gender politics that

shaped her" while simultaneously affording an opportunity for a kind of posthumous reconciliation. Although Kristin initially intended to focus on class and gender in her chapter, reflecting as she wrote on her own experiences as a young working-class immigrant in England "led to the realities of my own white privilege emerging again and again". And Tracey disclosed that in writing her chapter, she found/made two connections that genuinely shocked her: one about the unreliability of memory and the other, perhaps arising from the fact that "everything I've built in my life has been predicated on being clever", which she is still untangling. She also let us in on a fascinating conversation she had with a colleague about the writing of her chapter and about the level of 'exposure' such writing entails.

Readers will hopefully find their own resonances and connections within and between a set of autoethnographies that represent a testament to the ways in which even the highly detailed and specific 'personal' is 'political'. But reading my fellow contributors' accounts, I also sensed intimations of something else, behind or arising out of our writing labours. I surmise that as significant a motor as revealing the specificities of diverse lived experiences is an echo of Treacher's (2000) disclosure, after having told a powerful and moving story of being between two cultures and two colours, of now "wanting to inhabit a more ordinary place" (p. 97), regardless of singularity and difference. Notwithstanding the historical/political freight of the term 'ordinary' (Langhamer 2018), I hope that, in its inclusive impulses, this collection does indeed represent a place in which we have met as our ordinary selves.

It seems to me that we have also been engaging in two other apparently opposing impulses characteristic of 'liminality' and transition, even if the 'moves' we've made as we engaged in Lewis's (2009b) 'dance of sameness and difference' differed according to age, location and generational circumstances—sometimes in familiar and sometimes in surprising ways.

[Familiar: the boon to older contributors like me of having had access to free higher education, in stark contrast to the very real obstacles young people without independent means face now—such as the financial struggles that Claire and Victoria wrote about. Surprising (to me, anyway) when read alongside each other: the fact that in early 1960s Nottingham, Liz's secondary school head teacher was an Indian woman

while as a 27-year-old growing up in London, Motsabi had to wait till she got to SOAS[1] before encountering a Black teacher/lecturer].

Regardless of our differences, the 'moves' all of us described illustrate what I'd call autoethnography as 'writing for and against'. The 'for' is encapsulated by Richardson's (1994) 'writing as inquiry' together with the idea, encapsulated by the notion of poiesis, of 'making' ourselves (up) through the making of the cultural artefact that is the text—a creative process of discovery and production, a process that involves moving back and forth through time, a movement detectable in everyone's stories but referred to most specifically by Motsabi when she talked about her initial inclination to avoid "returning to the pivotal memories I carry with me" and encountering "what returning to them may involve".

The 'for' is also writing for a better future, in the way that Xiang (2016) wrote of 'theory as vision'—theorising that has the capacity not only to elucidate and articulate the actual, which these stories do most consummately, but also the possible—the alternative to what has remained silenced and unsayable. The 'against' is there in that corrective, in our 'counterstories' (Joseph 2019). As Motsabi put it, "throwing off some quite basic storylines that have followed me from childhood. Ones that I have been taught I should adhere to yet deny". This writing (or 'speaking' as Panya's poetry does so powerfully) 'against' appears in narrative strands running through all our stories, countering and 'throwing off' earlier 'theorisations' that act to mark, fracture, split and silence.

Ahmad (2001) tells us that her research with South Asian women is an endorsement of theoretical perspectives that advocate making the links between 'structure, culture and agency', those 'mutually inscribing formations' (p. 129). Understanding "some of the ways that gender, "race", ethnicity, class and religion can intersect and interact with internal dimensions of the 'self' at any given moment are crucial challenges to be addressed" (p. 138). Contributors here have added to that understanding. "Gendered and racialised Eurocentric discourses have fetishised and stereotyped certain aspects of South Asian and Muslim women's lives Ahmad says, fixing them as static and immutable signifiers of South Asian or Muslimness. They invoke discourses of 'degradation and despair'

[1] The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

… while at the same time acting to obscure manifestations of agency and empowerment by 'subalternised' subjectivities that fail to account for diversity and fluidity in expressions of identity" (2012, p. 194). Meena was clearly writing 'against' these fetishized and stereotyped tendencies when she opened her chapter with a couple of questions: "Do you feel sorry for me yet? Have you already decided that my story will make you angry with my parents and my 'culture' for treating me so horrifically?" before relieving us of the need to do either: "No need, fortunately. I'm not a victim. I'm successful. I've experienced positive, diverse and inclusive relationships that helped me to achieve what I've achieved."

What shines through all these accounts, I think, are both the complexities and the resilience of the writers' 'personhood'—resilience not in the 'neoliberal' sense that demands individuals continue to 'strive' in order to 'prove' their value, but in the sense that Kim Etherington (2003) was referring to when she asserted on the basis of her research that our 'spirit' survives and transcends our physical bodies—something that finds an echo from a slightly different angle in Panya's chapter. As I read them, all these autoethnographies appeared to me to be full of creative spirit; and in this, as well as in their contribution to a greater understanding of some of the ways that gender, 'race', ethnicity, class and religion can intersect and interact with internal dimensions of the self, and the impact such stories can have as evidenced by the 'conversation' in Chap. 19, they are a powerful validation of the 'method' and the capacities of the genre.

To return to Hanley's (2016) question that I cited in the Introduction, is the 'coffin' of class *still* empty? A final story: when this manuscript was almost complete, I went to stay in the North-East of England. I saw friends. I visited my Alma Mater. At the end of the week, full of happy memories, I drove south again through the most beautiful countryside. Until I saw the sign for Durham and was suddenly transported back to my *first* interview for that university (one I didn't write about in my chapter). Did I understand, or even know, when I chose it as one of my five options that Durham has a 'collegiate' set-up (like Oxford and Cambridge), where you have to be admitted to both a college and an academic department? Of course not. My diary tells me prosaically that "My interview with Dame Enid Russell-Smith (the Principal of St Aidan's College) went OK. She was very nice. We talked about books, the situation of the

country, the papers, school etc." It doesn't record what now came back to me so vividly. That when she asked me what newspaper I read, I had an instinctive feeling that it wouldn't be a good idea to say *The Daily Mirror*[2]. And not only because I knew that if she asked me to talk about something I'd read in it, mention of the first thing that came into my head—'The Perishers' and the 'Andy Capp' cartoon strips—wouldn't go down well (although I could sure do a deconstruction of these in class, gender and ethnicity terms now!) I knew that my middle-class school friend's family 'took' *The Observer*[3] on a Sunday and supported the Liberal MP Jo Grimond, but I wasn't confident enough to steal that persona either. So I said that I tended to get my news from the television. How fascinating, she said, and led me into an interesting conversation about the attributes of different media—a conversation I actually enjoyed, reminiscent as it was of past English lessons. So why the twisting in the gut I experienced in reaction to that mental ambush on the drive home? Because the emotional memory that accompanied the resurrected scene was of teetering dangerously on the edge of a precipice and only just managing to step back in time. The mind has cliffs of fall.

I was accepted by the College but not the Department. Does any of this matter, half a century on? Have I not long been a fully paid-up member of the educated middle-classes? As all the 'clever girls' gathered here are, if they 'choose' to espouse that persona? Well, yes. But what is significant is the kind of psychic 'repair work' one still finds oneself doing even after all this time. As I did before driving on, through more beautiful countryside, having regained my sense of knowing my place in the world. And knowing that that place is not beneath but alongside others, whoever they are. Structures of feeling, 'psychic economies' become internalised and endure.

What about the intersections of class, gender and processes of racialization—are they, as Taylor (2012) asserted, still pressing? With a post-Brexit rise in hate speech/crime (Lumsden et al. 2019) in the UK[4] and an old-Etonian MP who responded to accusations of the use of racist and

[2] left-wing tabloid

[3] 'liberal' broadsheet

[4] See also: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/23/victim-race-hate-crime

Islamophobic language by his friend and fellow old-Etonian (who had, at the time of writing, just become our new Prime Minister), by suggesting that it is important for politicians to use the kind of language that 'cuts through' to the 'ordinary' voter and that the people who object shouldn't be 'snowflakes'[5]; and the President of the USA suggesting that young congresswomen of colour who are making their voices heard should go back to the countries from whence they came[6], the need to attend to lived experiences of intersections not only between class, gender and 'race' but sexuality, dis/ability, nationality and religion remains pressing indeed.

And what of our 'ordinariness' and becoming? We have, to paraphrase Lawler (2017), taken the ordinariness of life and taken it seriously. Seriously enough to problematise its singularity. Against the polarisation in society that continues to threaten our collective well-being and our ability to tackle the burning social injustices and shameful levels of inequality that blight all our lives, TV presenter, photographer and writer Johny Pitts tells us that the term 'Afropean' encouraged him to think of himself as whole and unhyphenated: "It suggested the possibility of living in and with more than one idea: Africa and Europe, or, by extension, the Global South and the West, without being mixed-this, half-that or Black-other" (quoted by Grant 2019). Which takes me back to where I began in the Preface to this volume, with Deborah Levy's point about how exhausting it can be, learning how to become a subject—especially for those whose lives are lived at, in and through the intersections. It is a never-ending process, this becoming, as Tracey reminded us.

While I made a plea in Chap. 3 for being careful in our claims-making as researchers when using 'blurred genres', it is clearly not because I think we cannot learn a great deal from all forms of writing—fiction and non-fiction, prose and poetry, academic and non-academic—about the transformative potential of stories. Especially those that make room for finding our own paths, recognising that in these unpredictable and 'post-factual' times, we're all in the dark much of the time. Even more reason to be careful. Reviewing Diana Evans' novel *Ordinary People* (the time line of

[5] https://www.indy100.com/article/tory-leadership-race-jacob-rees-mogg-boris-johnson-islam-snowflakes-8956591

[6] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-48982172

which runs from the election of Barack Obama to the death of Michael Jackson), Katy Waldman wrote in the *New Yorker* (24 September 2018) that it "shows how we turn famous lives into stories; then it uses those stories to make the point … that our own lives are fundamentally unstorylike". British writer Hamish Whiteley makes the same point in one of his poems:

> **The Snow**
>
> We think that life
> Is arranged to make sense,
> Like a book with a plot,
> But it's not.
>
> Life's not some journey
> Through a ready-written story,
> From which we emerge
> Covered in glory
>
> It's more like walking at night
> In the snow.
>
> You try not to fall,
> And take care how you go.

This is why we story ourselves—to impose some shape, some meaning, some sense of control and direction—attempting to shore up the fragments, creatively making it up as we go along. This is, as Ingold (2010) observes, "to read creativity 'forwards', as an improvisatory joining in with formative processes" (p. 3). Processes that are not unfolding in a vacuum, of course. No woman is an island. A thread running through this collection is the idea that the 'auto' in autoethnography is a *relational* self (including being in relation to oppressive hierarchies of personhood); making these stories contributions to what Roseneil and Ketokivi (2016) call 'ontologies of relationality' (p. 154). As Phipps (2010) said, when authors assemble re/membered fragments from their pasts, they are doing so to enable a *certain* telling of a *certain* story. The stories we have told have illustrated some of the ways in which social relations are organised

according to classed, gendered and racialised regimes of value and economies of personhood. What status should they be accorded? As Melanie said in Chap. 19, they are all here for others to delve into. What readers extrapolate from them, as novelist Janice Galloway (2009) observed, is something over which authors have no control.

With reference to her novel (the title of which she took from one of the tracks on John Legend's *Get Lifted* album), Diana Evans tell us that the story she was telling as a person of colour arose out of her desire "to see the everyday in middle-class Black lives normalised and humanised." (Evans 2018 online). Which is not to say that the class/gender/ethnicity-related 'structures of feeling' that infuse our lives can simply be erased. Even now as an undeniably middle-class white person, I still marvel, when I see them—those walking, talking, unquestioning embodiments of entitlement. I don't envy them their wilful ignorance of the lived experience of others who have fewer opportunities, who have had 'spoiled identities' bestowed upon them through the workings of stigma as a classificatory form of power (Tyler and Slater 2018) or who have constantly to negotiate various forms of discrimination; but I sometimes envy that way of moving through the world with consummate ease that arises from a background different to mine. It takes some of us (almost) a lifetime to achieve something *similar*. Not the *same* since, like Steedman (1986) conversing with the women she used to meet at parties, one can never 'not know' what one knows in and under and through the skin. Still, a little of that being-at-ease is what I wished for in relation to this collection—that it would become a space where we could meet each other and readers as our 'ordinary' (as opposed to 'exotic', 'exceptional' or in some way 'othered') selves, where we would come to feel more 'composed' and more 'intelligible'—to ourselves and to readers seeking to celebrate their own ordinariness as clever girls and boys walking at night in the snow: at least for the time being. As Tracey reminded us "Endings are as arbitrary as beginnings, but with this crucial difference: all the beginnings that might exist are already there, back down the track, somewhere to be found if only you can follow the threads far enough; the possible endings, on the other hand, if not infinite, are numberless and cannot be glimpsed with certainty. The future is open." That being the case…

Try not to fall

And take care how you go.

* * *

Postscript

No fairy tale conclusion[7] here either.

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[7] See John Legend's 'Ordinary People' lyrics.

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